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History of the strange life of Captain
Joe Bruce,* a Young Scout, Indian
Fighter, Miner and Ranger,
and the Protege of J. B.
Omohundro, the famous
Texas Jack.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "FERRETS AFLOAT," "FLORA, THE
FLOWER GIRL," "ADVENTURES OF BUFFALO
BILL," "TEXAS JACK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BOY FORTUNE-HUNTER.

A WOMAN dressed in deep black, and a boy
clasping her hand, stood by the side of a new-
made grave.

* A living character of to-day, and the hero of
many a wild adventure.—THE AUTHOR.

BUT WHAT OF THE EBONY STAR! A PRODIGIOUS FEAT HE PERFORMED WHILE TEXAS
JACK RODE BEYOND AND HELD THE SAVAGES AT BAY WITH HIS TERRIBLE RIFLE.

The sun was going down beyond the Jersey hills, and its light fell full into the faces of the two, as they stood there, hand in hand, by that lowly mound in Greenwood Cemetery.

The woman's face was a sad one, and her eyes were red with weeping, while the boy who was clad in uniform, was a handsome lad of fourteen, with courage and determination stamped upon every feature.

"Ah, my boy, with your poor uncle in his grave, we have no one to care for us now, for I fear your father will never return, and something tells me he is dead," said the woman, in a low, trembling tone.

"Mother, father will yet come home, I am sure, for, once before you thought him dead, and after a year he came back, having been wrecked on the South American coast, and I don't believe he is dead."

"You are so hopeful, so brave, Joe; but we have nothing now to live on, and I am not very strong so you will have to give up going to your military school."

"Why, mother, I have been two years at the school, and know how to drill a regiment, I verily believe, while you know I got the first medal for my studies; and, as for work, I am more than willing, if you will only let me do what I wish."

"And, what is that, my son?"

"Well, mother, you have got money enough to keep you half a year at least, you said, and can board in the same place, where you and uncle live, while I can go to Texas."

"To Texas?"

The good woman started as though Joe had said he would go and kill a man.

"Yes, mother; for you know my chum at school was Walter Duke, and his father is a big cattle man, and when he was on to see Walter he told me I ought to come to Texas to make a fortune."

"But, what to do, my son?"

"I could start as a cow-puncher, mother," was the hopeful response.

"A cow-puncher?" echoed the lady, in horror.

"Yes, mother."

"And what is a cow-puncher?"

"Walter called them that, but they are also known as cowboys."

"Oh! become a wicked cowboy, Joe?"

"No, mother, only a few cowboys are really bad men, who get full of tanglefoot and raise Cain."

"Get full of tanglefoot and raise Cain?"

"Yes, mother; that is—they drink bad whisky and shoot people."

"Oh, Joe!"

"They are apt to go after a tenderfoot to frighten him."

"A tenderfoot, Joe?"

"Yes, mother; a pilgrim who is a greenhorn there, is called a tenderfoot. Oh, I know all about them, for Walter told me, and Mr. Duke wanted to give me some money, because I saved Walter from drowning that day in the Hudson that I wrote you about; but of course I refused it."

"That was right, my son."

"But, he told me if I ever wanted a friend, to come to Texas, and he would give me a small herd of cattle to look after and pay me thirty dollars a month as a cowboy, and I could save my money, buy stock with it, and soon get rich, and I just wish to go, for I can then soon be able to take care of you, mother."

"Ah, my son, I fear I could never give you up to go so far away."

"I've been away to boarding-school for two years, mother, and I guess you could stand it. I've got forty dollars saved up, and I would have plenty to get out to Mr. Duke's ranch with, where I'd soon make money for you, I know, so please let me go, mother."

The poor mother sighed heavily, and the tears flowed afresh again; but she uttered no word, and with a glance at the grave at her feet, turned away, still grasping her son's hand, for already were the shadows of night coming on, and it was a long way back to their humble home in the upper part of the great city of New York.

But, once little Joe Bruce had set his heart upon going to Texas, to seek a fortune for his mother, he did not relinquish the idea, and ten days after, with the consent of his mother, he started for the Lone Star State.

CHAPTER II.

HERO JOE.

JOE BRUCE was a youth whom all liked, and at school, strange to say, he was a favorite with both teachers and scholars.

His father was a sailor, a mate on a ship

which sailed to foreign lands, and was frequently away from home for half a year at a time.

During his absence, his wife and son lived with an old gentleman, the brother of Mrs. Bruce, and who was supposed to be well off.

He sent Joe to a military school upon the Hudson, and gave him ample spending money, and the boy repaid him by being all for his years that his uncle could wish.

Joe had not been long at school before he made a name for himself by taking the part of a lad who had been knocked down by a bully—a youth of sixteen, whom all feared.

The bully turned upon Joe, who had remarked:

"You are a coward to hit a small boy."

"I will thrash you for that, my fresh lad," and the bully ran upon Joe; but Joe had attended public school in New York, and had learned well from hard experience how to defend himself.

Joe's uncle, too, was fond of a boxing-match, and he had taught the boy how to put up his hands for defense, and also how to deliver a blow.

So when the bully rushed upon Joe, he was dazed and amazed to find himself suddenly on the ground upon his back.

But, only angered the more, he had rushed upon Joe again, and once more he measured his length upon the ground.

The boys now took courage and began to shout, for the bully had at last met his match.

Maddened at these taunts, he again rushed upon Joe, and managed to get hold of him, at which the boys held their breath, for they felt Joe would suffer now.

But the bully did not hold on long, but staggered back, with Joe's left hand clutching his throat, and his right raining blows upon his face.

Down he went, with Joe Bruce on top, calling out:

"Cry 'enough,' and I'll let you up!"

And the bully did ask for mercy, and from that day was cowed, for his brute strength had been no match for the skill and activity of Joe Bruce.

As for Joe, he became a hero, and added to his right to the title soon after by going all alone to sleep in a house that was said to be haunted.

It was an old homestead, standing on a hill out of the town and by itself, and the ghosts were said to play strange pranks there; but Joe had boldly faced the weird dangers, and though he saw no ghosts, he won the name of being the pluckiest boy in school.

In his lessons, too, he went to the front, and was soon made a sergeant from his expertness in drilling.

The boys were wont to go to the Hudson in the latter part of June to go in swimming, and one day Walter Duke, who had ventured far out, was seized with cramps. Joe went to him with all speed and brought him ashore, thus saving his life, though the effort to do so prostrated him for days.

This affair added still more to the fame of the brave lad, and Mr. Duke, who was a wealthy cattle man, coming on North, tried to force upon the rescuer of his son a handsome sum of money.

But Joe refused it, and the Texan then had a handsome and valuable gold medal made, upon which was inscribed:

"PRESENTED

TO

JOE BRUCE,

A Boy Hero,

For saving the life, at the risk of his own,

of

WALTER DUKE."

Walter Duke made Joe a present of a gold watch and chain, and the youth became known at the school as "Hero Joe."

Many other acts of courage did Joe do, to keep up his name as "a hero," until he was called home to see his kind uncle, who was dying.

Before he died, the old man told how speculation had ruined him, and he could leave his sister and her son barely enough money to support them for a year.

Thus he died, and feeling that he must go to work to support his mother, when her pittance was gone, Joe, with the heart of a true hero, and a love of adventure, had decided to go to Texas and lay the foundation of his fortunes.

A week after the day when he is presented to the reader, standing with his mother, at the side

of his uncle's grave, Joe started for Texas, his heart full of hope for the future.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE WAY TO TEXAS.

JOE BRUCE felt his importance in a wonderful degree, when he was on his way alone to far-away Texas. He had started for Little Rock, and upon his arrival there, began to look about him for the best way to get to his destination, for he had been told he could find wagon trains running from there into the Lone Star State.

He was fortunate in finding a train, to start in a day or two, and he sought out the one in charge and asked him about his going.

"Where's your outfit, my boy?" asked the train boss.

"I've got a rifle, sir, and some clothing," was the reply.

"Well, you will need some blankets, provisions, a horse, saddle and bridle, and a pair of revolvers, if you know how to use them, and are not too young."

"Thank you, sir," said Joe, in a dismal tone, for where to get such an "outfit" he knew not. He had sold such things of his at home as he had no need, and these, with the forty dollars he had saved up, gave him about sixty dollars.

Then, his mother had insisted upon giving him thirty-five more, and purchasing his ticket to Little Rock.

"I've got seventy-three dollars, clothing and my rifle, but I need a horse, saddle and bridle, blankets and provisions. What am I to do?"

As Joe asked himself the question a man stopped near him and asked him to hold a horse, while he went into a store. The horse was a clay colored mustang, with white tail and mane, and a very handsome animal. He had a new and elegant Texas saddle and bridle on him, with a lariat hanging to the horn, all new, it seemed.

"That's a nice horse, sir," said Joe, as the man came out of the store and thanked him.

"Yes, and if you are a crack shot you can win him, for he's to be shot for this afternoon, out at the wagon camps," was the answer.

"Shot for, sir?"

"Yes, I want to sell him, as I have two others, and I put him up, saddle, bridle and all as he stands for five dollars a chance, and there are to be fifty chances."

"Then I put up my belt of arms, which are a pair of Colt's best revolvers and a bowie for a dollar a chance with the pistol, fifty chances."

"Now's your opportunity, young fellow, to win all for six dollars," and the man laughed, as he sprung into his saddle.

"Where is it to be, sir?"

"At the wagon camps."

"When, sir?"

"At three o'clock."

"I'll risk the six dollars," decided Joe, for he knew that he had been called a marvel with both rifle and revolver.

His uncle had been wont to take him around to the shooting galleries, and it was seldom the boy had met his equal as a shot, both with pistol and rifle, for he seemed to possess a talent for sending a bullet to dead center.

So up to the hotel went Joe and got out his rifle, which he put in perfect order; then he set out for the wagon camps.

The man who owned the horse was there, and Joe addressed him:

"I've come to shoot, sir. Here is the six dollars."

"What! are you going to risk your money, against the good shots in these parts?"

"Yes, sir, I think I will."

"They are crack shots whose names are down on the list."

"I want a horse, sir, for I am on my way to Texas, and I am willing to risk the money."

"You've got pluck, but your money is thrown away, I warn you, so don't enter the contest."

"I'll try it, sir."

"Bravo for you, lad. I like your pluck!"

"But what pistols will they shoot with, sir?"

"Their own weapons."

"I haven't got any revolvers, sir."

"Then you can shoot with mine here."

"I wish I could try them, first."

"You shall. Come with me."

The man led the way to a secluded spot, and setting up a card on a tree, drew a ring with a silver dollar upon it.

This he blackened and said:

"The distance will be thirty feet, and each man to empty a revolver at a card like this."

"The one who comes nearest to putting the six shots in the bull's-eye gets the revolvers and knife."

"Yes, sir; and with the rifle?"

"One shot at fifty yards, another at a hundred, and a third at one hundred and fifty yards."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now, my boy, blaze away when I give the word."

He placed a revolver in Joe's hand, as he spoke, and at the word the youth leveled and fired six shots in rapid succession.

"Boy!"

"Sir."

"What is your name?"

"Joe Bruce, sir!"

"Do you shoot a rifle as you do a revolver?"

"Yes, sir," I think so."

"I guess you may scare some of those shooters, anyhow, for you put two bullets in the bull's eye, and only one missed the card, and that by a trifle. Try again."

Joe did try again, and the man remarked:

"You'll scare 'em, sure."

He then led the way back to the camp and found the marksmen were beginning to arrive.

In an hour's time all had arrived, the lists quickly filled up, and the shooting began.

CHAPTER IV. A BOY'S LUCK.

JOE was number thirteen on the list of names for the Belt of Arms, and the owner, who had taken a great interest in the little "pilgrim" said in a whisper: "It's an unlucky number, lad, and I wish I could change it for you."

"I don't mind it, sir."

The twelve shooting before Joe did some crack work, and the boy watched the marksmen anxiously, as each one took his place to fire; but when his turn finally came he stepped out with perfect coolness. A number laughed rudely, as they saw a boy having the temerity to contest with dead shots for a prize; but a cheer followed the laughter, when Joe's six bullets went into the bull's-eye! "The belt is yours so far, lad," said the owner, in evident glee.

Then followed the other marksmen, and when the fifty had all fired it was found that Joe and four others would have to shoot off the tie.

The boy stepped out once more, with the same coolness as before, and again his bullets entered the bull's eye and a shout of applause arose.

The other four followed quickly, but only one tied Joe.

"I yield to the boy," he said generously, and then he asked:

"Youngster, in what part of Texas did you learn to shoot a revolver?"

"I learned in New York City, sir, for I never was in Texas."

"The mischief you did! Then I'll shoot the tie off with you, for city teaching could never make you do that a third time."

So the tie was shot off and Joe won by getting his six bullets fairly in the bull's eye, while the man had one on the line.

"The Belt of Arms is yours, Joe," decided the owner, handing them over, with real satisfaction.

Then the marksmen were called up for the rifle-shooting, which would win the horse, saddle and bridle.

By a strange coincidence Joe was number thirteen on this list, also.

At the fifty yards distance Joe saw that his bullet was not as near center as several of the others, and he anxiously watched the others that followed; but, none did better than the shots already made, and the New York boy gained confidence once more.

At the hundred yards he made a dead center shot, and repeated it at the longer range.

There was one who had made a dead center for the fifty and one hundred distances, so he tied Joe, and they shot off several times, but with the same result.

"We'll draw for it, my boy," said the man, who was the same who had tied him before.

Twenty-five numbers were then written on bits of cards and dropped into a boot, and the one who drew the highest number won.

"Go ahead, youngster," the man ordered; "you shall have first pull."

Joe put his hand in quickly, for he knew that it trembled, so near was he to the coveted prize.

"Thirteen, sir," he announced, holding up the number

"Twelve," called out the man, and a shout went up for Joe.

"Thirteen seems a lucky number for you, my lad, and I'm right glad of it. Here is your horse, and your outfit for Texas is about complete."

"Thank you, sir, very much. What is the name of the horse?"

"Texas Jack. I named him after a friend who is the greatest scout in Texas."

"I've read of him, sir, and of Buffalo Bill, too, and I wish I could become a great scout such as they are."

"You have started in well, little fellow; from the way you shoot I think you will do for Texas," was the answer.

Shaking hands with the man, whom his accidentally meeting had brought him such luck, Joe mounted his horse, and with his belt of arms about his waist, rode back to town.

He soon purchased two blankets, ammunition, provisions and all that he needed, and returned to the camp with forty dollars left and a light heart, for he felt that he had laid the foundation of his fortune!

The wagon boss, having been a witness of his remarkable shooting, called him aside for a talk, the result of which was that Joe was hired at twenty dollars a month as a train hand.

Finding that he was already earning money, the dutiful son went into town and expressed back to his mother twenty-five dollars of what he had, writing her a long letter, and telling her of his good fortune thus far.

The next day the wagon train pulled out for Texas, and Joe felt that he was fairly launched upon his new and adventurous career.

But, hoping for adventures to beset his path, he little dreamed what was before him in the years that must follow.

CHAPTER V. TREACHERY.

JOE BRUCE had gone to Texas, as it were, to "grow up with with the country," and he determined to learn all there was to know, as fast as he could master it. He attended to his duties faithfully, and yet had time to listen to the stories of those in the train who had had experience.

He made friends with the guide, and learned now to judge of the "lay of the land," and look out a good camping-ground. He went on hunts with the hunters of the train and soon became quite expert, while he got all the "points" he could on Indian-fighting.

Joe soon grew to be a great favorite with all, and one night was called upon to give a history of himself for the edification of all.

In his modest way he told the little story of his life, and having brought him the several gold badges he had won, along with the very elegant one given him by Mr. Duke he showed them around along with his gold watch and chain and told how he was going to the ranch of his old chum's father, to start in on the life of a cowboy.

"Suppose you do not get a place there, Joe, what will you do?" asked one.

"Oh, I've got money enough to keep me until I find something to do," he answered.

"You'll not starve, Joe," replied the man, who seemed deeply interested in the youth, and he added:

"I've got a ranch myself, and if you don't get along elsewhere come to me, and I'll find work for you."

Joe thanked the speaker for his kindness, and from that day the two became great friends.

They had now crossed the Red River, and many here left the train, branching off to their respective destinations; but there were a number of emigrants who still held on, going to the localities where they meant to settle. Joe kept with them, as the Duke Ranch was not very far from where they intended to halt.

The man who had become so friendly with the New York lad was a rough-looking fellow known as Parson Prime, for his name was Peter Prime, and he had won the title of parson from the fact that he was always singing hymns around the camp-fire and upon the ranch.

One day he asked Joe to go on a hunt with him, and then had started off bright and early, the guide telling them to keep a bright lookout for Indians, as they were in a dangerous locality.

They saw a quantity of game, but Parson Pete urged that they push on, saying that he knew the country well, and that they would soon find buffalo.

Delighted at this prospect Joe was more than willing, and with confidence in the "Parson," he said nothing more about going back.

At last they came to some heavy timber, and Parson Pete said:

"You just camp and rest here, Joe, while I look about us, to see there are no Indians about."

Joe dismounted, lariat out the two horses, and Parson Pete went off on foot.

As Joe was preparing to build a fire, to cook

their dinner, his eyes fell upon a slip of paper upon the ground.

To his surprise it was addressed to

"MUSTANG MOSE."

Now Mustang Mose was a man who had taken several horses into Arkansas to sell, and was carrying back to Texas several animals which he intended to dispose of.

Joe had heard it whispered around that Mustang Mose had doubtless stolen the horses at each end of the line, for the man was an evil-faced fellow, with the reputation of being a rascal.

Opening the slip of paper he read:

"Go at daylight to the Red Timber Motte, and I'll be there about noon. I'll leave him on some excuse and find you, and then you will! now what to do, and we'll find out if the result repays us for our trouble."

PETE."

This little slip of paper set Joe to thinking.

Parson Pete had always seemed to hate Mustang Mose, and yet here he was secretly plotting with him, and it could only be about him.

He remembered that Parson Pete had told him that very morning that he believed there was a thief in the train, and to be careful to carry his gold prizes and money with him, leaving nothing behind.

Instantly suspecting the parson, he crept away on his trail.

A walk of a quarter of a mile, and he saw the parson ahead. But he was not alone. Mustang Mose was his companion, and the latter was mounted.

Instantly Joe retraced his steps to where the horses were, and at once looked to his weapons.

In a short while Parson Pete returned alone—which looked suspicious.

"Did you see any red-skins, sir?" asked Joe.

"Nary red."

"Then we are all right?"

"Yes, lad."

"And nobody is about the timber there, sir?"

"Not a soul, Joe."

"Parson Pete, how'll you trade revolvers and knife?"

"I'm willing for a trade, any time, Joe—always on the dicker; it's one of my failings."

"Let me see yours, please."

The parson unbuckled his belt and passed it over.

"Now, parson, I've got you! Put up your hands, or I will kill you."

"Eh! What! Curse it, Joe, no fooling with me."

"I am not fooling with you. Up with your hands or I will kill you," and Joe evidently was in dead earnest.

"But, boy, I—"

"Quick!" and the revolver was cocked and leveled directly at his head.

The man muttered a curse and obeyed.

"Now, Pete, you walk off out on the prairie, and keep going, for I'll send a rifle-bullet after you if you halt."

"But, Joe, I—"

"Do you hear?"

The parson heard, and he obeyed, and when he had disappeared over a rise in the prairie, several yards away, Joe quietly hid in some brush.

He had not long to wait, for he saw Mustang Mose riding slowly toward the camp, glancing about him, as though searching for some one, and seeing the horses of the parson and Joe, called out:

"Ho, Pete, whar is yer?"

"Hands up, Mustang Mose!"

The man started, attempted to drop his hand upon a revolver, when there came a sharp report and one of his fingers was clipped off at the middle joint.

"Hands up, I say, for I'll shoot to kill next time!" cried Joe.

Up went the hands of the ruffian, while he said:

"What in thunder ails yer, boy?"

"Mustang Mose, if you tell me the truth, I'll let you go, but if you lie to me I'll kill you, so take your choice," and Joe left his ambush and quietly walked toward the desperado, still covering him with his rifle.

CHAPTER VI.

MASTER OF THE SITUATION.

"WHAT does yer want o' me?" suddenly demanded Mose.

"When did you leave camp?"

"Early this morning."

"What for?"

"Hunting."

"Hunting what?"

"Game."
 "What kind of game?"
 "Prairie game."
 "Mustang Mose, you are lying to me, so look out."
 "What is yer drivin' at?"
 "Did you not come here to hunt me?"
 "What for?"
 "The money you thought I had."
 "You hain't got much."
 "You thought I had, and you and Parson Pete were pards to rob me."
 "Whar is Pete?"
 "Gone where you'll go if you trifle with me, for I did you no harm, and you meant to murder me, you and Parson Pete; but I found this bit of paper which you dropped here, and it let me into your game."
 "If I tells all you'll let me go?"
 "Yes, for this time."
 "All right. Pete came to me and said as how you had a watch, chain and medals wu'th five hundred dollars, and a horse and weepens wu'th a good sum, while he calkulated you had a snug little roll o' money, and he asked me to come here and lay for you and him. He was to look me up and leave you in camp, and when he came back I was to slip up and shoot yer. Then we was to divide and go to other parts. So now yer has it down fine, youngster."
 "Well, I'll keep my word with you and let you go, but you don't deserve it."
 "I didn't do it, though."
 "You never got the chance."
 "Has you kilt Pete?"
 "I ought to have done so."
 "Whar is he?"
 "I told him to start across the prairie, and you are to do the same."
 "Me?"
 "Yes," and stepping up to the man he quickly disarmed him, his hands still being held up in the air.
 Then he made him dismount and said:
 "If you wish to catch up with Pete, you had better start. When you overtake him tell him to come back here with you, and you will find your rifles against this tree, one knife, and one revolver. Your blankets and traps on your saddle you shall also have; but your horses and other weapons I shall take. If you want them, come to camp after them."
 "They'd hang us."
 "Then don't come."
 "But you hain't going to rob us?"
 "No, I intend to turn your horses and weapons over to the train boss, and let him do as he deems best."
 "That hain't right."
 "Look here, if you are not satisfied I'll drive you both back to camp before me."
 "I is the one to be satisfied with all I gits; so good-morning, lad, and maybe we won't meet again."
 "Maybe we will, and I will not be so good to you then perhaps, so git!"
 "I'm off."
 "See, I place your rifles and things here."
 "When you overtake Parson Pete, tell him to come back here with you."
 The man seeing that the youth was master of the situation, struck a rapid gait and went after his comrade in guilt.
 Parson Pete had not hurried, after getting over the rise of the prairie.
 He preferred to linger and see how the affair turned out back in the timber. He heard the shot, and, ten minutes after, Mustang Mose came over the prairie rise at a gait which indicated that some considerable pressure was behind him.
 He waited until his comrade came up and then said:
 "Well?"
 "That don't look well, does it?" and Mustang Mose held up his shattered finger.
 "I'll have to dress that for you."
 "It needs it—but come, we'll go back to ther timber."
 "Thet little imp will kill us."
 "No, fer he's gone by this time; but he left us our rifles, a revolver and a bowie-knife, our blankets and outfit."
 "He's generous."
 "Yas, fer he might hev left us thar fer ther wolves ter chaw."
 "And how about the horses?"
 "He says we kin git them by callin' at ther wagon camps."
 "I am enjoying good health now, and the camps would be unhealthy, Mose, after our little game against the boy."
 "Jist so; but my finger hurts like git out, so let's go to ther timber and fix it."

As they went over the rise they saw Joe riding off, half a mile away, leading their horses, and upon reaching the timber, they found that he had left them all, as promised.

CHAPTER VII.

DEFENDING FOES.

LEAVING the timber, Joe started for the wagon-train. He realized that now he must wholly depend upon himself, for, with Parson Pete for guide, he had taken no notice of the way they had traveled.

He started out upon the trail, but was able to slowly follow it, although in places it was very indistinct.

It was near sunset when he rode up to the banks of a small stream where he had seen a man standing awaiting his coming.

It was Pathfinder, the guide of the train, and he had selected the spot for a camping-place, as there was good water, grass and wood, three very essential things for a good camp.

"Ho, Joe, whar's yer pards, fer I see yer has Pete and Mustang's horses with yer?" called out Pathfinder, who was an old plainsman.

"I left them back on the prairies, sir."

"What! Hain't seen no red-skins, has yer?"

"No, sir, not a red."

"Been in no scrimmage then?"

"It did not come to that, sir, but I'll tell you about it," and the New York boy told his story.

"Sainted wildcats! I wish I had gone ahead this morning, as I thought o' doing! This 'ater are a dead give away, and I am surprised ther parson writ it!"

"He did not wish to be seen talking with Mose, after the way he said he hated him."

"That's so; but you was too good to the skunks. You should hev put lead in em h."

"Oh, no, sir, I could not have done that."

"Waal, yer hain't got yer hand in yit, fer in a human life, but ef yer lives on the Texas paraders, lad, yer'll come to it."

"I has had ter do it, though it is a mean business ter take ther soul away from a man which his God hev give him."

"But then some of 'em hes sich honery souls, maybe they is better dead."

"Yet yer should hev turned 'em loose on ther parader without a weepen or grub."

"No, no; I gave them their rifles to protect themselves, and their provisions and blankets so they would not suffer."

"You was too good; but yonder comes the train, and when you has told your story thar'll be men in that crowd as will want ter hunt down them varmints and hev a hangin' match."

And so it turned out, for a dozen horsemen started in pursuit of the two desperadoes.

They tried to get Joe to go, but he would not do so, and they went off, determined to capture the two scamps who had been wolves in sheep's clothing in their midst.

The train moved on at dawn the following morning, and camped at noon.

But the man-hunters had not returned to camp, and Pathfinder said he felt sure they had struck the right trail, and were following it to the end.

As the train went into camp for the night, in a heavy piece of timber, the party of horsemen were seen coming across the prairie, and their shouts told of their success.

Soon after they rode up, and in their midst were Parson Pete and Mustang Mose, pallid-faced and trembling.

"We took their trail and followed 'em until we caught 'em; and they made big time for being on foot," said the leader.

"I am sorry you caught them, for I don't wish their blood on my head," Joe said.

"We'll take their blood on us, Joe, and up they go, mighty quick to a tree," was the reply.

Joe was white-faced, and seemed nervous, but unheeding him, the men got lariats and slipped them over the heads of the two desperadoes, whose hands were tied behind them.

Then they were led beneath the limb of a large tree, and the train people gathered around, the old bordermen with indifference, some with interest, and the emigrants with expressions of horror upon their faces.

"Pards, we don't allow no sich red-hand work in our camp, and being as you meant to kill little Joe Bruce and rob him, we'll just send you whar yer kin do no more o' thet kind o' business," said the leader.

The two men were silent, but trembling, and the leader seeing that they made no reply, continued:

"Now, ef yer knows prayers, it's jist yer time

to shout 'em, fer you has got ter go durned sud-dint."

Just then Joe stepped forward, right between the leader and the doomed men.

"Mr. Cranston, I want you to spare these men," he said, boldly.

"Joe, you is a leetle fool."

"I may be, but I ask it. They did not harm you, but me, and I let them go. I was sorry you went after them, and now that you have them, I beg you to let them go."

"What on 'arth does yer mean, kid?" said the astonished man, while all gathered around with deeper interest.

They knew that Dick Cranston was a man who loved bloodshed, though he always managed to be on the safe side of justice, and they also knew that he was not one to brook interference.

"I mean just what I say, Mr. Cranston; you must let these men go. What they meant to do they did not accomplish, and they have been badly frightened, their horses have been taken from them, and so they have been punished."

"So please let them go."

"I'm durned ef I do."

"Well, Mr. Cranston, you force me to tell you that I have as much right to a say about them as you have, and they shall not hang."

All drew a long breath, for the boy was at bay, and he meant just what he said.

Then all eyes were turned upon Dick Cranston.

"Boy, you has put on too much style for a kid, and I'm going to take ther starch out o' yer fer yer impudence to me, an' then I shall hang yer pards."

As he spoke he stepped to one side and pulled a leather strap from a saddle.

"Do you intend to strike me, sir?" cried Joe, as he saw the man advancing toward him.

"I intends ter wallup yer, kid."

"If you touch me, I shall kill you."

The eyes of the boy flashed and he dropped his hand upon his pistol.

In spite of his known pluck Dick Cranston quailed before Joe's flashing eyes and firm mien.

Then the man's hand also dropped upon his revolver butt, and he said:

"Boy, as you says, those men sha'n't hang. Yer puts yerself in ther place o' a man, so I'll treat yer as sich. If yer means fight, so be it!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A YOUNG BENEFACTOR.

THAT bloodshed would follow the bold act of Joe Bruce, and the determined attitude of Dick Cranston, all feared. The train boss gave a glance about him and saw that the sympathy of most all was with the boy.

It is true not a few wanted the two scoundrels hanged; but as the boy who had been wronged did not, he certainly had the right to decide; but Dick Cranston was too ready to find victims, and had a few sympathizers, for it was not a camp of saints, by any means.

The train boss knew that Cranston was a bad man to have the enmity of, and yet heartily wished to get across the country without trouble in his camp. He liked the bold boy, and wished to defend him, and yet was undecided as to the proper course to pursue.

Just at this point another man stepped forward. It was Pathfinder, the train guide.

"Pard Cranston, you is wrong here, and the boy is right, so let up," he said quietly, as he stepped to the side of Joe.

"Does you side with ther kid, Pathfinder?" angrily asked Cranston.

"I does! and more—I don't intend ter have no fight here atween a tenderfoot boy and a man who has been for years on the border."

There was no mistaking these words, and seeing that the affair was now becoming serious, the train boss stepped in.

"Dick, you are wrong, and you must give in. If the boy don't want those men hanged we must respect his feelings. When he's been longer on the prairies, he'll be less tender-hearted, perhaps; but you must give in, Dick Cranston, for there must be no trouble."

"And let these cut-throats go?"

"If the boy makes no charge against them, yes!"

"I do say let them go," reiterated Joe decidedly.

Cranston sullenly stepped up to the two desperadoes, took the lariats from about their necks, untied their hands, and, turning their faces toward the setting sun, got behind them.

"Go!" and at the word he gave them each, in quick succession, a heavy kick which accelerat-

ed their movements, and a loud laugh followed the hastily departing forms.

"Boy, you has got narve, and though it nigh came to trouble, I respects yer. An', here's my grip for it!" Dick and Joe grasped hands with pleasure.

Thanking Pathfinder and the train boss for coming to his aid, Joe sauntered away, with assumed carelessness to his own outfit wagon and was seemingly busy there. What he was doing we shall see later on in this real story.

That evening around the big camp-fire, he was asked what was to be done with the horses, weapons and outfit of the two desperadoes, for the scoundrels had been sent out of camp with nothing but the clothes they had on.

"There's an emigrant here, who only has an old span of mules and one wagon, and he seems mighty poor, so give them all to him," decided the boy.

"Joe, you are a man, as far as your big heart and pluck go. You have done the right thing, as that man is very poor, I know, and he's got but ten dollars left, he told me," the train boss remarked.

"Well, let us give him Parson Pete's horse and weapons, and raffle the other outfit off for his benefit. I'll take chances of a dollar in the rifle, as much more in the belt of arms, and five on the horse, saddle and bridle."

"Bravo for you, Boy Pard!" cried rough Dick Cranston, heartily, and he and the train captain put down their names for chances.

"What number will you take, Joe?" asked the train boss, who was getting up the list.

"Thirteen every time," answered Joe, with a laugh.

The list was soon made up, Joe buying chances for the poor emigrant, his wife and eldest boy.

The drawing of the numbers then took place and Joe drew the rifle, Pathfinder got the belt of arms, and the emigrant's wife, with tears of joy in her eyes, won the horse, saddle and bridle!

"I make you a present of the rifle," said Joe, to the emigrant's son, a lad of sixteen.

"And I give you the weapons," added Pathfinder.

"My dear lad, I was a very poor man, for, robbed of everything by those in whom I trusted, I was forced to emigrate, and what I have here is all I possess in the world; but through you, I have now nearly three hundred dollars in cash, two horses, and weapons, and I am rich!"

"God bless you, my noble boy, wherever you may go!" and the emigrant's voice choked with emotion, and Joe walked off, glad to escape the cheers given him as a benefactor of those in real distress.

CHAPTER IX.

JOE AND THE RED-SKINS.

A WEEK more and the train reached a point about fifty miles from the Duke Ranch—the nearest distance it would be; so getting all the information he could from Pathfinder, the trails he was to follow, the brave boy bade farewell to his new-found friends, and set out alone bright and early one morning.

He had seen enough of prairie life to have an idea how to get along, and determined not to be called a tenderfoot, or in other words a greenhorn, he was very glad to be thrown upon his own resources so he loitered along the way, shooting at what game came near, and waiting quite a while for his first real prairie repast, prepared by his own hands.

Pathfinder had told him to keep a good lookout for red-skins, for just at that time the Indians were causing a great deal of uneasiness through that region; but Joe felt confidence in his horse, which in the numerous camp races was the victor, and there were some fine and fleet horses in the train.

Early in the evening Joe halted again, determined to camp for the night, cook a good supper, and take matters quietly.

He had halted in a piece of scattering timber, upon the banks of a small stream, and had just started to strip his horse when his eyes fell upon a dozen horsemen who were coming over the rise of prairie across the stream. It did not take a second look for the boy to discover that they were red-skins in full war-paint.

They at once discovered Joe and drew rein, and the lone boy knew well enough that his first "scrimmage" was at hand.

Would he be equal to the emergency?

A sickening sensation came over him like a flash and he realized that he had the Injun fever—that is, a total inability to be brave just

at that moment. His hands trembled so that he could hardly refasten his saddle-girth, and his knees were weak and quaking as with a chill.

The Indians in halting did so to discover how many more foes were there besides the boy.

"There are thirteen of them, and it's my lucky number," muttered Joe as he sprang into his saddle.

At once came a yell, in chorus, and a shower of arrows, with two rifle-shots, but though unhurt, Joe was greatly scared.

Where was his rifle? It was on the ground where he had placed it!

To leap off his horse and seize it was his next act while Indians were riding for the stream on a full run!

To throw his repeating rifle across his saddle and empty it in rapid succession, without aim was his almost thoughtless procedure, and not until the chambers were empty and he sprang into the saddle. The yells of the Indians told him he had hit something, but whether red-skin, mustang, or both, he did not know, nor did he tarry to find out.

Away he dashed, followed by a shower of arrows, and Joe gave a slight cry as one buried itself in his shoulder.

He tried to pull it out but could not do so, and desisted, while he pluckily reloaded his rifle, as he ran.

He was now out upon the open prairie, riding for a ridge of wooded hills several miles away, and behind him, not two hundred yards came the red-skins, almost abreast. He saw that there were but twelve, but whether the thirteen, or his horse, was dead, Joe could only guess.

He saw that the Indians were well mounted and soon realized that his fleet pony was to have his riders tasked to distance his pursuers.

Then came a single rifle-shot from the leading Indian, and the snort his horse gave told Joe that he was hit.

Hard hit, too, for the frightened beast at once became lame, and the red-skins were gaining!

The ridge was yet several hundred yards away, and the red-skins were but a short hundred behind him, when his horse stumbled and went down, and Joe fell so heavily that he was knocked senseless and did not hear the wild yell of triumph from the pursuers.

CHAPTER X.

TEXAS JACK.

A FEW moments before this fall of Joe's pony, two horsemen rode up to the top of the ridge which the boy was striving so hard to reach.

One was a white man, the other a negro.

The former was a man of thirty, with a handsome, fearless face, bronzed almost to the hue of a red-skin, and with eyes very bright and restless.

His chestnut hair was wavy and worn long, falling upon his broad shoulders. His form was athletic, indicating great strength and endurance.

He was clad in buckskin leggings and hunting-shirt; he wore cavalry boots, armed with Mexican spurs, and upon his head was a broad-brimmed sombrero, ornamented with a diamond five-point star in front, and on the left side of the crown was an eagle embroidered in gold, with an ingeniously made rattlesnake-skin, looking lifelike, made the hat-band.

His horse was a splendid black animal, the trappings being Mexican. His arms were a silver-mounted repeating-rifle, revolvers and bowie-knife, a gold star being set in each weapon.

His black companion was a giant in size, with a face that was full of character.

He also was dressed in buckskin, wearing moccasins instead of boots, and carried a repeating-rifle, revolvers and knife.

His sombrero was looped up with a gold star, and his horse was a large roan, his trappings being Mexican.

"Ah! There's a race for life, Star," cried the white man, as he reached the top of the ridge and beheld Joe flying at full speed and the Indians in pursuit.

"Yas, Massa Jack; and he looks like a young feller, too," responded the negro.

"True; he appears to be but a boy, so we'll chip in, Star, or those red devils will catch him, sure as my name is Texas Jack."

"They will, for sart'in, sah."

Down the ridge the two rode, and had reached the thicket at the bottom just as Joe's horse went down.

"He's down, Massa Jack!"

"So I see. Push on, Star, and rattle your rifle as you ride. I will pass the boy, but you pick him up and bring him back to the ridge here, and I will follow, to cover the retreat. Now for it!"

With a yell that was well-known to the red riders, Texas Jack dashed out of the thicket, and close by his side was Star, the ebony giant.

The red-skins were nonplused at first, and momentarily drew rein, but seeing only two enemies they dashed on again, determined to reach the boy and get his arms and scalp.

The silent form lying upon the prairie might be dead, but the red-skins should not have his scalp; So the daring scout decided.

Star, as ordered, opened fire with his rifle as they charged, and being a repeater, it rattled out the shots in a lively way.

An Indian fell from his horse, and a horse went down under the fusillade.

Then Jack opened fire, shooting slowly but surely, and when he had dropped four red-skins from their saddles, the balance turned and hurried off out of range of that dreadful "long-talk gun."

One of those killed was the chief. His horse dashed near Jack, who, as he passed, seized the ever-ready lariat from the horn of his saddle and caught the animal, which proved to be a truly splendid mustang.

But what of the ebony Star?

A prodigious feat he performed while Texas Jack rode beyond and held the savages at bay with his terrible rifle.

Still seated in his saddle, his repeating rifle hung at his back, the giant leaned forward and over, as the big horse dashed up to the unconscious boy, and, as he passed, the limp body was seized, and Star sat erect, in an instant, with Joe clasped in his right hand.

Then he turned the horse's head back toward the cover of the wood, while Jack rode back to the spot where the poor, wounded pony now lay, and, seeing its leg was broken, mercifully put a bullet in its brain, and slowly retreated to the thicket, where Star had preceded him.

Once in the thicket he dismounted, and approached Star, who was now bending over the boy, looking anxiously in Joe's pale and pair-marked face.

"He's not dead, Star?" asked Jack.

"No, sah; he have bled free from this arrow wound, and he struck his head on ther pararer, fer you see it's scratched here, sah, and it stunned him, but I guess he'll be all right soon, for ther arrer wasn't p'izened."

"That is good. He's a handsome fellow, Star, and cannot be over sixteen. Look after him, Star. You are a goo' doctor, as I well know. I'll have to start those red-skins off again, as they look as though they meant to give us trouble for the loss of their chief, whom I brought down the first shot."

"Yas, sah, I'll look arter him, sah," responded the giant, and Texas Jack rode out upon the prairie toward the red-skins, who had halted in a group some distance off.

As he approached they fell back, for they well knew the long range of his deadly rifle, and putting spurs to his horse, he caught the Indian pony that was running loose.

The red-skins gave a yell at this, but, unheeding it, Texas Jack stripped the dead Indians and ponies of their arms and trappings, and rode quietly back toward the ridge.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCOUT'S PROTEGE.

"How is the lad, Star?" quietly asked Texas Jack, as he entered the thicket.

"He's come to, sah, but I guess he's kinder out o' his head a leetle."

"Then we had better take him at once to the cabin."

"Yas, sah, it would be best; but you didn't scalp ther Injuns, Massa Jack?"

"No, Star; I know how you prefer to do that, and left it for you."

"Yas, sah, I'll do it now, for a Injun hain't dead until he is scalped, sah," and Star mounted his horse, and with a yell darted out upon the prairie.

The Indians fell back before him, but seeing his intention, they made a bold charge to save the scalps of their comrades.

Star stood his ground, and Texas Jack seeing his danger, dashed out to rescue him, and the repeating rifles rung out their deadly music once more, the result of which was that the negro got another scalp, and the scout caught the pony of the warrior just killed.

"Now, Star, we must leave the ridge at once," said Jack.

Lifting Joe in his strong arms, he handed him to the negro, and leading the captured ponies, they set off on their way to their lonely ranch, twenty miles distant.

The scout lagged back, after reaching the ridge, to see if they were followed, but the redskins had evidently been more than satisfied with the loss of three of their number and four ponies, and remained upon the prairie to bury their dead, retreating then to the timber, where they had discovered Joe, to the body of the first of their comrades who fell, for the boy's rapid firing had not been thrown away.

It was midnight when at last Texas Jack, and Star bearing his burden, rode up to a clump of timber several acres in size.

In it was a stockade fence forming an inclosure of half an acre, and in one end of this was a cabin stoutly built of logs.

This was the prairie home of Texas Jack, many a long mile away from the nearest settlement, and here he dwelt alone with Star, the faithful negro whose life he had saved several years before, and who had clung to him with an undying friendship ever since.

There was a large spring in the timber, the stockade was large enough to accommodate the hundred cattle and half a hundred ponies owned by the scout, and the cabin was a comfortable structure of three rooms.

When going away from home for a day or so, and taking Star with him, the scout was wont to shut his horses and cattle up in the stockade, leaving only a half a dozen large and fierce dogs in charge.

But when both, or either of them, were at home, the cattle and ponies roamed at will over the prairies.

Having seen Indian signs about, Texas Jack and Star had gone off on a scout, and thus it was they fortunately came upon Joe, whose career in Texas so nearly ended under the fury of red-skin revenge.

Finding that Joe was threatened with brain fever, for he had had a heavy fall, Star set to work to doctor him, according to his knowledge of medicine, which was considerable, for he had once been assistant nurse in an army hospital.

Texas Jack had a small case of medicines, and the two did all in their power for the poor boy, nursing him day after day until at last the fever was broken and reason returned.

"I am not dead, then," said Joe one day, looking curiously about him.

Texas Jack was away on a scout, and Star was seated just outside of the cabin door napping.

He started as he heard the voice of his patient, and entering the cabin said:

"No, sah. You has been very sick, though."

"Where am I?"

"In Texas."

"I think I remember."

"I was running from some Indians, and my horse fell with me."

"Yes, sah, and broke his leg."

"Poor fellow; but I thought, when I hit the ground that he had broken my neck."

"No, sah, but he stunned yer considerable."

"Is my scalp safe?" and Joe raised his hand weakly to his head.

"Oh, yas, sah, it's all safe and you is getting along prime, and must be cheerful and build up."

"That's some scalps hanging yonder, sah, we got ther day you tumbled."

"Did I kill any Indians?" asked Joe, with a slight shudder.

Massa Jack said you did, sah, for he followed yer trail back to the timber on the stream, and found whar you had kilt a Injun, and his pony."

"Who is Jack?" wearily asked Joe.

"Massa Texas Jack, sah."

"Texas Jack!" and Joe brightened up.

"Yes, sah, this is his cabin, and we seen you when you fell, and Massa Jack and me beat ther Injuns off and fetched you here, and you has been three weeks sick almost."

"Texas Jack," murmured Joe, in delight, and tired out at the exertion he had made he sunk to sleep.

When he awoke the famous scout stood by his side and said in his frank way:

"My lad, you must get well now, for I'm going to make you my *protege*, for I met Pathfinder the guide this morning, and he told me all about you."

"Get well now, for you are to be the Boy Pard of Texas Jack."

"Oh, thank you, sir," said Joe, and he was perfectly happy at his meeting with the great scout and being so kindly treated by him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE YOUNG TRAILER.

It was not very long before Joe was able to be out, and he was most anxious to show his appreciation of all that Texas Jack and Star had done for him.

He had written a long letter to his mother, and the scout had carried it to the nearest settlement where it could be mailed, and Joe had inclosed in it thirty dollars of his wages, and told her prospects were bright ahead, though he did not say what those prospects were.

The scout had promised to ride over to the Duke Ranch with him some day, and he had given the youth the horse of the chief whom he had killed, so that he was once more mounted.

Joe showed him a specimen of his shooting, with both rifle and revolver, and Texas Jack had told him that some day he would make his mark as a dead shot.

"If Mr. Duke hasn't a place for you, Joe, you can come back and stay with me as long as you please, and I will be delighted to have you, while I will teach you all I know about the prairie," the kind-hearted scout had said.

When the boy had fully recovered, he mounted his horse one day and started with Texas Jack on the trail of some Indians, which the scout had discerned not far from the ranch.

"We must come up with them, Joe, head them off, and see just which way they are going, for my idea is that they mean mischief and plenty of it," Jack had said.

Striking the trail they followed it for a long distance and discovered that it joined another and a larger one.

Still keeping on a third trail was also seen merging into the other two, and a fourth and a fifth were discovered, and the scout came to a halt.

"Joe?"

"Well, sir?"

"Quit saying *sir* to me, and calling me *Mister Omohundro*."

"I'm a plain Texan, and my name is Jack."

"All right, sir—*Jack* I mean."

"That's right; but do you see how these trails have come together?"

"Five of them?"

"Yes, and I've been calculating how many reds made them."

"Do you know?"

"Well, there were all of thirty that came by my cabin, sixty in the next trail, a hundred in the third and fifty in the fourth and fifth, as well as I could tell from the tracks in the soft ground."

"Two hundred and ninety?"

"Yes, about three hundred braves, and they are on the war-path."

"They came to this point in separate parties, so as not to be seen in full force, and they mean to attack the river settlement, just twenty miles from here."

"They are now hiding in the timber some ten miles away, and after night comes will raid the settlement and surprise it."

"Can nothing be done to warn them?"

"Yes."

"Can we do it?"

"How strong are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right."

"Then we will have to make a big flank movement and push our horses hard, for we will have all of thirty miles to ride, and the sun is only about two hours from setting."

"Let us be off."

They turned abruptly from the trail they had been following, and started off at a canter.

Their horses had not been pressed, so were comparatively fresh, and they were kept at a pace that put ten miles to the hour behind them.

When the sun was on the horizon the animals showed that they were getting fagged, and the riders drew rein, threw off their saddles and bridles, let the horses crop grass for a while, they rubbing them down meanwhile, and then giving them some water, after fifteen minutes' rest, pushed on again.

"Now they must stand it, and we've got fully ten miles before us," said Jack.

And one hour after the staggering, panting horses darted up to the first cabin of the settlement and the alarm was quickly given to the occupant.

Then through the settlement went the scout and Joe, warning all, and telling them from whence they might expect the Indians.

Knowing the country thoroughly, Texas Jack suggested a point of rendezvous for the settlers, where the redskins could be ambushed, and thither they went in haste, mounted and armed, while the women and children drove in the

stock and made ready to receive the men, should they have to retreat to the cabins.

The spot chosen by Texas Jack was a pass between two hills, and here three-score settlers assembled, while a party of thirty were mounted and ready to close in on the rear of the redskins when the fight began.

Within an hour after the arrival of Jack and his Boy Pard in the settlement all was ready for the fight, so thoroughly accustomed were those bold bordermen to meet danger with dispatch and firmness.

Jack had left Joe with the ambushed settlers, while mounted upon a fresh horse, he had gone with the mounted party to attack in the rear.

Presently the word of warning was passed along that the Indians were coming.

The night was dark, but the tramp of many hoofs was heard, and before long a dark line of horsemen came into view.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVED AND LOST.

Joe had taken up a good position along with the head man of the settlement, and who acted as captain of the men.

Joe had told him that his repeating rifle was of long range, and could be emptied very quickly, and he was taken by the captain among the first of those in ambush.

The Indians now appeared, and they were riding in double file, that they might keep closer together.

The settlement they knew was a mile away, and once they had passed between the gap in the hills they would spread out and attack it along its entire length.

They had not seen a single white man on their march, and they had not the remotest idea that their attack would not be a complete surprise.

The first Indians were allowed to pass entirely through the gap, and then they halted, waiting for the others to come up.

"Open the ball, my young friend, whispered the captain."

Joe picked out his man very coolly, and then came the crack of his rifle.

It was followed by flashes and reports from the hills upon either side, and the leaden hail went flying among the surprised redskins.

Loud rung out the cries of the settlers, and, finding that they were surprised, where they meant to surprise, and by a foe they did not know the numbers of, nor could reach, the Indians gave forth a series of terrific war-cries, and began to retreat through the gap.

Then came shots behind them, the rattle of rifles, cheers of the mounted settlers, and above all, ringing out like a trumpet, the well-known battle-yell of Texas Jack.

In dismay, believing that the soldiers were also upon them, the redskins swept back through the gap in the hills.

For a moment they seemed as though they meant to rush for the settlements and burn and kill there; but a party of settlers, late in reaching the scene, opened fire on them, and they broke away in a mad race for life along the base of the hills.

Texas Jack, calling to all the settlers who had their horses, to mount and press them, dashed on in pursuit, and thus a running fight was kept up for several miles, until the Indians were utterly routed, and broke into a dozen different parties to escape their pursuers.

"What, are you here, Joe?" said Texas Jack, as the settlers drew rein, and the scout beheld the youth near him.

"Yes, Jack, the captain let me take his horse, and I came on," was the answer.

Back they went then, and upon reaching the hills they found the settlers burying the redskins, and catching the Indian ponies whose warriors had been slain.

The wounded Indians were not put to death, as some suggested, but carried to a cabin to be cared for until well enough to depart.

Jack and Joe at once became heroes, and they spent the balance of the night in the cabin of the captain, but started back home after breakfast the following morning, for the rest had brought their horses around all right again.

As they ascended the rise of prairie, which gave them a view of the scout's cabin, Texas Jack said, through his shut teeth:

"I feared it, when I saw that trail leading this way."

"You are burned out," gasped Joe.

"Yes, and my stock all run off; but what of Star?"

They spurred forward with full speed, and soon drew rein at the smoking ruins of the cabin.

It had been burned, along with the stockade

fence, and not a sign of a horse or any cattle was to be seen.

But the loss of his home and his little wealth did not impress Texas Jack as did the sight that his eyes rested upon not far away.

There, tied to the ground on his back by stakes driven so as to make his hands and feet fast, was poor Star.

"He is dead," said Joe, in a whisper.

"Yes, he is dead, and he was tortured to death, for see how they have mutilated the poor, noble fellow.

"We saved the settlement, Joe, but we are about ruined.

"But I will be avenged for this; I swear it, and mine is no idle oath.

"To-morrow I shall go back to the settlement, get me a pack-horse with a good outfit, and take the trail of those Indians, going by the Duke Ranch to leave you."

"Jack!"

"Well, Boy Pard."

"Do you think I would desert you now?"

"No, indeed! I'm but a boy, but I'll not leave you in your distress.

"My mother is not in want; she has enough to live on for a year, about, and I will stay with you until you get settled again, for it won't take you long, I guess!"

"Not after I have let a little blood flow to avenge poor Star, for I will feel better then.

"Come, Joe, let us camp here and give the ponies a rest, and then we will go back to the settlement, and I'll start anew in life," said the plucky scout, with no sigh for his losses, but deep sorrow for poor Star's cruel fate.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOE LEAVES TEXAS.

WHEN Texas Jack and Joe rode back to the settlement and made known what had happened, the settlers felt the deepest compassion for the brave scout, and a party of volunteers at once started for the scene, with ox-wagons, axes, and all necessary tools to rebuild the home for the brave man who had saved them from ruin and death.

The scout readily obtained two good horses from the settlers also, and using one as a pack-animal, and the other as an extra, in case of need, he set off with his Boy Pard for the country of the red-man.

It is not my desire to carry the reader with young Joe Bruce during the months he passed with Texas Jack upon the trail of the Indians, for their lives were in daily and nightly peril, they were forced to keep moving from point to point, and had many a skirmish with their foes.

The scout gleaned much valuable information while, which enabled the soldiers at the nearest fort, to make several successful attacks upon the red-skins, and on one occasion Texas Jack sent Joe for a force of settlers and a severe blow was struck which greatly demoralized the Indians and made them glad to patch up a temporary peace with the whites, for temporary only could it be.

When Jack returned to his ranch, he found that it was a better one, and a stronger one by far than he had formerly had, and the good wives of the settlers had furnished it in the best frontier style.

From the red-skins he had captured many ponies, and these started him again as a ranchman, as he sold a number and bought cattle with them.

But he greatly missed his negro comrade, Star, and as he glanced at the faithful follower's grave said grimly:

"You have been avenged, poor Star."

Texas Jack was anxious to have Joe remain with him, but the youth had visited the Duke Ranch and found all the family away, and the man in charge had no authority to hire more help than he then had.

But Joe had found there a letter which awaited him, having come to the care of Mr. Duke.

This letter was from one who signed himself Allan Morse, and he was the poor emigrant whom Joe had befriended so well when with the train.

He stated that the money with which he had been provided, through Joe's kindness, had enabled him to push on up into Arizona, where he had a brother who was mining, and that soon after his arrival he had "struck it rich," and was in a fair way to make a fortune, and wished Joe to come there and join him.

Joe was anxious to "strike it rich" too.

He longed to make a fortune and place his mother beyond want.

His share of the horses captured from the Indians, he had sold in the settlements for a snug

little sum, and had already sent the money, nearly a thousand dollars, to his mother.

He also invested a couple of hundred in cattle, turning them in with the herd of Texas Jack, and considered that the foundation of his fortune was laid.

As a cowboy he could not certainly get rich, while in Arizona he might do so, and, as Mr. Duke was not at his ranch he decided to go.

His experience on the plains in the adventurous life he had led, and with such a teacher as Texas Jack, had caused him to feel perfect confidence in himself, and he determined to start alone for the Arizona mines where Allan Morse had settled.

He had his own well-trying horse, the one that had belonged to the Indian chief, and two others which he had picked out of the lot of captured ones.

One of these he made a pack-horse, and going to the fort sutler, he purchased all that he could possibly need.

Jack had given him a fine young dog, a cross between a bloodhound and bull-dog, and the captain who commanded the settlers on the night of the Indian raid, had made him a present of another one, and a splendid brute it was.

"I don't fear to have you go alone, Boy Pard, for you can take care of yourself about as well as any man I ever saw, and those dogs will be true as steel, while two of your horses will be hard to catch.

"Good-by, the Lord bless you, and don't forget that this is your home."

So said Texas Jack, when Joe left him and started upon his long and dangerous trail to Arizona.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO VISITORS IN CAMP.

WITH the first discovery of precious metal in Arizona, there at once sprung into existence a band of men who sought to rob those who got their money by hard work in the mines.

As these outlaws were wont only to rob the silver trains and those known to possess riches, they soon became known as the "Silver Kings."

They had their haunts in the mountain fastnesses, and they were wont to make an attack when least expected, upon some of the trails running to and from the mines.

Now it was a mule train they pounced upon, then a stage-coach, and again they would make a dash upon more isolated miners.

There were a few troops in the country, but they were kept busy fighting the indomitable Apaches, and it would have taken a regiment of soldiers to hunt down the small band of Silver Kings.

As for the miners, when, driven to desperation by their losses, they organized and became Man-Hunters, the outlaw band could nowhere be found, and they had left their mines on a fruitless errand they very soon discovered.

That the Apaches realized the Silver Kings as being robbers, warring upon their fellow pale-faces was evident from the fact that though they were the relentless enemies of the whites themselves, they never disturbed the outlaws, and, but for the red-skins which they had also to fear, the miners might have run down these pests of the trails.

As he progressed on his lonely trail it was seldom that Joe met any human being, and, in fact he was rather anxious to avoid any, as he had been told that he would find lawless men on his way.

"Avoid settlements as much as possible, and camps," Texas Jack had said to him.

"For though you may find good friends in all, there are always some desperadoes lurking around, who, knowing your trail, would go ahead and ambush you for your horses and arms.

"There are plenty of men, Joe, who would kill you out in these wilds for a revolver or a ten-dollar bill."

From what he had already seen of the country, Joe Bruce came to the conclusion that it would be better for him to keep to himself, dodge the settlements and keep a good lookout for the Indians.

Jack had drawn him a rough map of the way he was to go, and he kept wide awake and followed it closely, though of course he had himself to rely upon only.

He traveled slowly, camped early, did not start early, and spared his horses all he could.

He shot what game he needed, and really liked the long, hard trip, for he felt that he was gaining experience thereby which he could not otherwise obtain.

One day two Indians unexpectedly rode into his camp.

He was on the alert, and stood ready to greet them as friends or foes.

They appeared friendly, however, and one of them spoke to him in broken English, saying:

"Me friend."

"So am I," said Joe.

"Young white brave heap all alone?"

"Oh, no, I am not alone," and Joe cast a significant glance at his dogs and horses, the former seeming anxious to get a bite of Indian flesh.

"Dog good?"

"Yes."

"No bite?"

"I never saw them bite any one."

"Which way go?"

"Arizona."

"Go for heap silver?"

"Yes."

"Red man hungry."

Joe gave them something to eat, and then they departed.

But Joe felt that he was not rid of them, and feared there were more of them near.

He determined to be most cautious, and he started on his way, but followed the trail of the red-skins.

He soon came in sight of them, and seeing him they pretended not to do so, and rode away to the left.

"Those rascals are up to mischief, so I will look out for them when I camp to-night."

"They warned me of the outlaw band known as Silver Kings, but I think they are to be dreaded even more," said Joe, and he sought a good camping-place that night, for somehow he felt that he would need one.

CHAPTER XVI.

NOT CAUGHT NAPPING.

THE spot chosen by Joe for a camp was in a short canyon.

It ran back into a high hill, from the valley through which he had been following the trail westward, and penetrated hardly more than a hundred yards.

There was a quantity of dry brush in it, and a few logs, for a fire, at the upper end, and grass grew abundantly near the opening in the valley.

The canyon had two bends in it, so that any one passing along the valley could see no fire-light at the further end.

It was early when Joe went into camp, and he hastily cooked his supper, as soon as he had staked his horses out to feed.

There was a brook near, and so the youth could not have wanted a better camping-place.

When it grew twilight he brought his horses nearer to the camp, staking them out a hundred feet or more away from the fire.

Then he drew his saddle and pack-saddle a short distance back from the fire, and made a shelter of his india-rubber blankets.

His hat and heavy coat he placed upon a blanket, putting an extra pair of boots there too.

Over these he threw a blanket, and with the hat at one end, the boots at the other, it had the appearance of being a sleeping form.

Then Joe called to his dogs, and went down the canyon.

A thicket on a bowlder was just the place he wanted, and he got up there, calling the two dogs up after him.

The thicket concealed them perfectly, and from there he had a look down the canyon, and could also see his horses and the camp-fire, which he had built up afresh before leaving.

"I may be losing sleep for nothing, but somehow I don't think so," he mused, as he placed himself in position.

Darkness had fallen before he got settled, and then an hour or two passed, and Joe was napping, when an uneasy movement of his largest dog aroused him.

"Be still, Grip! Silence, Grab!" he whispered, and the well-trained and thoroughly obedient animals uttered no sound, but their eyes were kept fixed down the canyon.

Joe knew that something was wrong, for neither Grip or Grab ever deceived him.

They had been trained to utter no bark, or loud growl, and their actions alone warned their master of danger about.

Soon a dark form was seen creeping along one side of the canyon.

It was surely an Indian. Then Grip turned noiselessly and looked up into his master's face.

It was to show him another dark form creeping along on their side of the canyon, and within a few feet of the bowlder.

But neither the boy or the dogs moved.

The two forms crept up to the bend in the canyon; one glided across to the other and they whispered together, their faces being turned toward the camp-fire.

Joe remembered that one of the red-skin visitors to his camp that day at noon, had a rifle, and the other had a revolver and bow and arrows.

The two forms, now visible in the firelight glare, he recognized as the same he had before seen, at which he was relieved, for he had feared there were more than those two about.

After whispering a moment together, the two Indians moved closer to the camp.

The horses saw them, one gave a snort, and the three stood watching them earnestly.

Then the Indians crept nearer, and halting, one of them raised his bow, took a deliberate sight and sent the arrow flying, as he believed into the body of the youth.

The thud of the striking arrow was heard by Joe, the blanket moved under the blow, and quickly two other arrows were sent in quick succession, hitting fairly as had the first.

The Indians seemed to be surprised, and put their heads together in confab once more.

They had fired arrows to cause no alarm, if possible, to the dogs, and the latter remained quiet.

The one who had the rifle stood ready to fire, should the dogs, whom they seemed to fear, dart out upon them, and his comrade who had a revolver kept it in his hand for instant use.

As though to draw the dogs from their lair, so that they would not be suddenly sprung upon, and believing that they had killed the youth, one of them gave a suppressed war-cry.

But no dogs came, and in dismay the Indians turned and looked at each other.

Then both yelled together, one of them firing a shot from his revolver at the blanket dummy.

Still no sound, and they started to go away but, suddenly, a form confronted them back in the shadow, while they were in the glare of the firelight.

A shot flashed from Joe's rifle, two fierce yelps were heard, and as one red-skin went down with a bullet through his brain, the other was dragged to the youth by Grip and Grab.

In horror at the sight of his dogs springing upon the other red-skin, Joe rushed forward to call them off, but the sharp teeth of Grip had met in the throat of the Indian, and he had already gone with his comrade to the happy hunting-grounds of his people.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SILVER KINGS.

To say that Joe was elated at his escape from his intended assassins, would be to "draw it mildly," he was overjoyed, but he regretted that he had to take life, Indian life though it was.

The horrible death of one of the Indians, at the teeth of the dogs, haunted him, and it was some little time before he could feel at ease again; then, with his hatchet and knife he dug a grave large enough for the two bodies, and, when it was filled in, dragged brush over it, as he had seen Texas Jack do, to prevent the wolves from digging up the bodies.

Leaving Grip and Grab on watch, for though the dogs slept, it was "with one eye open," he lay down upon his blankets, removing, however, beyond the glare of the camp-fire, which he now allowed to die down.

It was some time before he fell asleep, but at last he did so, and found the sun looking down into the canyon when he awoke.

Pressing on his way, avoiding here and there Indians which he saw at a great distance, Joe at last arrived within the silver region.

He was riding along one evening, looking for a place to camp, when suddenly two men rode out in the trail before him.

Joe glanced hastily behind him.

There he beheld three horsemen.

All five wore masks, and were well mounted and most thoroughly armed.

"Silver Kings, I guess," muttered Joe.

What to do he did not know, for to fight five men was out of the question.

Then there might be others near, and doubtless were.

The strange horsemen did not give him long to consider, for one called out in a voice not to be mistaken in its deadly meaning:

"Hands up! or we riddle you with bullets!"

Joe's experience had taught him not to delay in urgent matters, and he thought this was an urgent one.

So up he held his hands, at the same time coming to a halt, his two led horses and the dogs

stopping close on the heels of the animal he was riding.

Instantly the five men came riding toward him.

He examined them closely as they came forward.

As I have said, they were well mounted, one riding a large horse with a military saddle and bridle, two of them having Mexican gear, and the remaining two Texan rigs on their mustangs.

They wore revolvers in their belts, a knife also, and swung at their backs were rifles, one of them a repeater.

They were dressed in various styles, from buckskin and a uniform, to a miner's costume, wore large-brimmed slouch hats, and their masks were simply red cloth coverings for the face, in which two eye-holes were cut.

"Well, sir, you are the game of the Silver Kings," said the leader of the strange horsemen to Joe.

"You've got me, that's certain," was the youth's cool response.

"You've got pluck, my boy."

"Thank you, I need it when I have to face such fellows as you."

"Who are you?"

"Joe Bruce."

"Where from?"

"Texas, I guess."

"It takes Texas to turn out such lads as you are; but where are you going?"

"To the mines."

"What for?"

"Fortune-hunting."

"Which mine in particular?"

"Do you know a camp known as Silver Star?"

"Yes."

"I was going there."

"Are you not going there, now?"

"That depends upon whether you've got conscience enough to let a poor boy go."

"A poor boy?" sneered the Silver King.

"Three horses, two dogs, a fat pack and well armed; you don't look very poor."

"But I am."

"I can tell you how you can get rich, then, if it is riches you want."

"Let me know, if you please, how."

"Join our band."

"I'm no thief," was the indignant reply.

"Go slow, boy, with your hard names."

"I beg pardon, gentlemen of the road."

"Don't be smart, for you are in trouble now."

"So I see."

"You'll not join us?"

"No," with decision.

"Then you can seek the Silver Star on foot, unarmed, and minus what valuables you have about you."

"I told you that you were thieves," hotly said Joe.

"I guess we better keep him as he is, until the cap'n arrives, pard," said one of the masked men, addressing the one who had been spokesman.

"Why not rob him and let him go now?" asked the other.

"Because it's my opinion ther cap'n can get more out of him than we kin."

"That's my way o' thinkin'," said another of the band.

"What makes you think so?" asked the leader.

"Waal, I kinder thinks I has seen him afore, and he is more than he says he is."

"He's from Texas, and he may be a friend o' ther cap'n, and if not, I guess he'd know him."

"But the captain won't be here until to-morrow morning."

"We kin keep him safe, and I'd hate to make a mistake, for he's only a boy, and you knows ther cap'n are friendly with Texans."

"That's so. Well, if you will guard him, while the rest of us keep on the trail you can do so."

"All right, but I'd like my pard to help me, for he hain't goin' ter be no gentle kitten to watch."

"Very well; disarm him now and take him back to camp with you."

"We will wait here for the stage, and if you hear the bugle-call, we will need help, so keep the boy tied so that you can come to our aid."

"All right, pard," was the answer, and disarming Joe, the two men rode away with him in the gathering twilight, one riding by his side, and the other leading his horses, while Grip and Grab, seemingly in sullen humor, trotted after the party, seeming to fear that their young master had gotten into a scrape there was no getting out of.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DEED THAT WAS REMEMBERED.

THE two horsemen who had Joe in charge, turned off from the trail with him, following a wild and narrow ravine that ran back into the recesses of the hills.

Night was upon them in that wild place, before they had gone very far; but the men seemed to know the way well, and after a ride of half a mile the glimmer of a camp-fire appeared ahead.

As they rode up to it Joe saw that it was a mountain camp, and there were two fires, some brush shelters, and the appearance that it had been but lately occupied.

A couple of horses, with pack-saddles near them, were staked out in an open space, and near the fire was a tin bucket of water, a frying-pan and coffee-pot.

"This is our camp, youngster," said one of the men, as they drew rein.

"It's a poor camp for Silver Kings," replied Joe, determined to take his captivity as coolly as he could.

"You is plucky, to be funny when you is in sich danger."

"It wouldn't help me to cry, would it?"

"If so, I'll start in."

"You needn't; but just dismount thar."

Joe obeyed.

"Pard, give them horses a bite o' thet grass yonder, and a leetle water from the brook, while I gits a bite for the young gent and them ugly dogs."

"You call my dogs ugly?"

"Waal, they isn't handsome."

"I think they are beauties."

"Waal, I hain't goin' ter quarrel with yer about them brutes."

"They looks savage enough to eat me up."

"And would if I gave them the wink."

"Lordy! but my pard has yer weepens and horses, and yer c'u'dn't git away."

"But jist sit thar, and I'll find yer some supper."

Joe sat down as directed, the dogs crouching on either side of him, and the man bustled about and soon had some coffee on the fire, a tin plate of crackers, and in the frying-pan a rasher of bacon, while a venison steak was put upon the coals.

The other man now came up, having staked the horses where they would get a good feed, and the two outlaws held a talk apart together; then they approached the fire, and one of them said:

"Your supper is ready, lad, so fall to."

"And you?"

"We had our grub afore we went on ther trail."

Joe was hungry and he "fell to" with a will, eating a hearty supper, and not forgetting his dogs, which the two men also tried to feed, but were surprised to see that neither Grip nor Grab would touch a thing they gave them.

"Them's cur'us dogs," remarked one of the men.

"They look as though they'd chew us, ef they got the chance," remarked the other.

Joe laughed.

Then one of the men said:

"Boy, yer don't know us, does yer?"

"No, and I don't care to."

"Well, now, don't be sharp, fer we means yer well. Come, Pete, let's do it."

They put their hands to their faces and removed the red cloth which served as masks.

"Mustang Mose and Parson Pete!" cried Joe, in the greatest surprise, and his excited manner caused his dogs to show their teeth viciously.

"You is right, pard, we is them," said Mustang Mose.

"And you are Silver Kings?"

"We is."

"Robbers?"

"Well, we is, I guess."

"Then I suppose it's all up with me," and Joe dropped a hand on each dog.

The men looked at each other, and then Mustang Mose said:

"You talk, Pete."

"Well, leetle pard, the fact is we knew you just as our lieutenant halted you, but both of us said nothing, and Mose, after a while, suggested leaving you here in camp until the captain comes in the morning."

"The stage is expected along to-night, and the other boys have got to lay for it, so we came back in camp with you, for we wanted to help you."

"Help me?"

"Yes, for we have not forgotten how you saved us both from hanging, that night at the wagon-train camp, and when we were sent off

on the prairie by Dick Cranston, without a revolver even to keep the wolves off or to get food, you came after us with a rifle, a revolver, knife and food, and told us you didn't want to see us perish.

"We've been bad men, Boy Pard, and are still bad, but before those pards of ours should have robbed you, we would have fought the three of 'em."

"You are good fellows, after all—shake!" said Joe.

"No, we are bad fellows; but we have not forgotten how we meant to kill you, and you got the best of us, and then, when Dick Cranston hunted us down and went to hang us, you saved us."

"It was a deed that we didn't forget, Joe Pard, and so we'll prove by letting you go free this night."

"But, dare you do it?" asked Joe.

"Oh, yes, for we'll get out of it some way, as you can reckon."

"You bet you goes your way unharmed this night, Joe, and that's why we fed you and your horses, for you've got to be gittin' pretty soon," announced Mustang Mose, earnestly.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SILVER STAR.

JOE was surprised and pleased to find friends where he had expected foes.

He had a tender heart, and although the two men had greatly wronged him, he could not bear to see them go out on the prairies without a blanket, food or weapon on that evening when they were driven out of the camp; so he had quietly gone to the wagon, where he kept his traps, and securing a rifle and revolver and knife, bought from a train hand, and getting a blanket and a few provisions also, he left the camp, and covered by the shades of evening, started off after the outcasts.

He called to them when out of hearing of the camp, and they awaited his coming.

"Here, pards, I don't wish to see you go this way, so take these. Good-by."

It was all he said, and handing over the things he hastily ran back to camp.

This was the act which had not been forgotten by the two outlaws, and so they determined to save him.

"Pard Joe," said Mustang Mose, "we may git a bugle call at any minnit, and if not, some o' ther boys might ride inter camp, so we wishes ter git you off at once."

"What will you say to your pards?"

"Oh, we'll smooth 'em over some way."

"And you will let me go free?"

"Yes, and tell you jist how ter go 'round ther mountain, arter you gets through the pass half a mile from here, and then you kin take the upper trail for ther mines."

"Suppose he meets some of the men, and maybe the captain's party?" suggested Pete.

"Thet's so."

"How far does this trail we came here on, come out from where your comrades are stationed?" asked Joe.

"About two hundred yards."

"Why can't I go that way?"

"It's risky, if the boys were to hear you."

"I'll take the risk, and one of you might ride on with me to the trail, and then down to your comrades, saying one was enough to guard me in camp."

"That's so, and I'll stay, and after you are well out of the way, Joe, I'll go to join you, Mose, and say the dogs jumped on me and held me so I could do nothing, and ther boy took my weapons, tied as was his hands, and then stuck my knife under his foot and cut his bonds with it. Then he tied me, while the dogs held me, don't yer see? and you must tie me up prime, but I'll pretend to have got my legs free and then put after you to tell that the boy had escaped."

"Parson Pete, you is a born, gilt-edge liar, and you will do."

"Thet are ther very game," said Mustang Mose.

"But if I meet any of your people, I will be taken again," said Joe.

"Pard, I intends ter help yer out on that."

"Yer see each one o' us has a silver star we wears, and I has know'd ther cap'n to give several of 'em away to Texas pards he hev recognized, so thet those as has 'em will be safe."

"Now I stole one of 'em one day from ther cap'n, and ef yer meets even ther cap'n, jist say you was halted by Lieutenant Nick, and he give you this, and said he would explain to ther cap'n why."

"Yer'll go through and no mistake, and here is yer star."

"I'll pin it jist here."

As Mustang Mose spoke he pinned a large silver star upon Joe's hunting-shirt.

It had some lettering upon it, which the youth made out.

In the center was the word:

SILVER,

and on each of the five points was a letter:

K. I. N. G. S.

"Thank you," said Joe, and then Mustang Mose went to work tying up Parson Pete, making the foot-rope loose so that he could readily untie it.

Joe's horses were then brought up, and, as he was ready to mount, he said:

"I do thank you so much for letting me go; but I must tell you that your good deed was its own reward, as, when you were both sitting with me at the fire, before you said you would free me, I was about to give my dogs the word, and they would have had their teeth in your throats at once, and then it would have been easy work for me to escape."

"Lordy, Pete, let's tarn good, for I tell yer we jist escaped it," said Mose, and it was very clearly seen that both of the men were frightened at the escape they had made.

"Now, pards, good-by, and let me beg you to give up your wicked lives, go to the mines and make an honest living, for some day it will be the rope-end."

"Don't talk so, Joe; but I guess it will be as you say."

"Good-by, Boy Pard, and luck to you," said Parson Pete.

Joe now mounted, and Mustang Mose having already done so, they started for the trail, by the way they had come to the camp.

"Joe Pard?"

"Yes, Mustang."

"If we meets any one you must let 'em have it."

"Shoot them?"

"Yes."

"Is it necessary?"

"There is thet needcessity fer-it, that yer'll be tuk in if you don't."

"Are we likely to meet any one?"

"Jist as like as not."

"Well, let me ride in front and I'll defend myself."

But they reached the trail without seeing any one, and Mustang Mose showed Joe the way he was to go.

"Better push on lively, pard, when yer gits whar yer hoofs won't be heerd."

"Don't think I is as bad as I look, me nor Parson Pete nuther, for we hain't."

"Good-by, Pard Joe, an' ef it comes your way to do us a good turn some day, don't forgit us."

Joe grasped his hand and then rode on his way.

As he felt that he was out of hearing distance of the Silver Kings, he urged his horses into a canter, while he said:

"Now I can do as I hoped, when I asked to come this way."

"Warn the stage of the danger ahead of them."

CHAPTER XX.

THE WARNING.

AFTER his escape from the Silver Kings, Joe rode on his way rejoicing.

He felt that he had had a close call.

If the two desperadoes had not had the feeling of gratitude in their hearts, he would have been sacrificed, or he would have had to call upon his dogs to defend him, which, after the manner in which the Indian had fallen under their attack, he shrunk from with horror.

Still he had made up his mind to let Grip and Grab secure him, rather than remain a prisoner to the Silver Kings, with the chances of their putting him to death a very certain thing.

As he rode on he was looking ahead for the expected stage.

He had asked to come that way that he might warn those in the stage of danger, and yet neither Parson Pete nor Mustang Mose had thought of this.

The boy had looked ahead further than their cunning had permitted them to see.

Joe did not feel himself bound by their having let him go, not to warn others of danger, and so he determined to tell those in the coach just what force the Silver Kings had.

In that part of the country a coach was seldom on time, and Joe knew that it might be still miles away, but he was soon cheered by hearing the rumble of the wheels.

Presently it appeared in view, coming along

with the horses at a swinging trot, and Joe halted and called out:

"Ho, driver, stop a minute!"

The stage drew rein at once, and the driver said in a sullen tone:

"You must be a tenderfoot at stage-robbin', ter call out that way."

"I am no stage-robber," indignantly replied Joe, and the driver said:

"What is yer then?"

"I halted you to warn you that there are Silver Kings ahead waiting for you."

"I was half fearin' that; but how did they let you pass?"

"It was not their intention to do so, for I was captured and sent to their temporary camp, and escaped."

"You was in luck."

"Yes; but how many passengers have you?"

"Five insiders, and this gentleman on ther box with me."

"The Silver Kings are but four."

"What!"

"There will be four to halt you; but one is bound in camp, where I left him, if he has not managed to get free and join his comrades."

"If he has there will be five."

"Yes."

"And does they intend to halt seven of us?"

"Oh, yes; for they do not think you can know their numbers; but if you all stand ready to fire when halted, and empty your revolvers pretty lively, I don't think you will have any trouble in going through."

"I guess not, and we'll go loaded for 'em."

"But who are you?"

"My name is Joe Bunce."

"Not from these parts?"

"No, I'm from Texas."

"And which way are yer going?"

"To the Silver Star Mine."

"Has you come through Arizona alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Been picked up by the Silver Kings and got away?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you still lives?"

"So it seems to me."

"Well, pard, I'll jist christen you Arizona Joe, durn yer t'other name, and I tells yer squar' thet yer deeserves ter run this kentry, fer coming through it this far alive."

"I'll see yer at ther Star Mine when next I pass, and I thanks you kindly fer your warnin', Mister Arizona Joe."

"Yer'll hear how we got through the Silver Kings when next I sees yer."

The stage then rolled on, the occupants preparing for running the gantlet of the Silver Kings.

Joe rode slowly along, until the roll of the wheels died away in the distance.

Then there came to his ears the sound of rapid and distant firing, and a moment after the faint notes of a bugle were heard, as indication that the coach had gone through right.

Feeling glad that his warning had been successful, the youth rode on once more, determined not to halt to camp until he had placed quite a distance between the Silver Kings and himself.

Leaving the mountains, where the trail wound down into the valley, he began to look about in the darkness for a camping-place, when suddenly, out of a clump of timber rode a dozen horsemen and Joe felt that if they were foes he was fairly caught.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE "MAGIC STAR."

WHEN Joe saw the horsemen almost upon him he quietly drew rein and the dozen men in front of him made a quick circuit and surrounded him.

They were evidently surprised at meeting him, but they acted with promptness and had he intended resistance, they would have had him at their mercy before he could have fired a couple of shots.

He saw by the starlight that the men were masked, and he was sure that he had fallen into the hands of the Captain of the Silver Kings, whom Mustang Mose and Parson Pete had felt assured that he would meet on the trail, as they were expected.

The first thought of Joe was as to his star.

Would it prove of any service to him, or after his fortunate escape before was he now doomed to be held as a prisoner?

A large man on a black horse rode right up to Joe and peered closely into his face, at the same time holding a cocked revolver in his hand.

"Well, who are you?" asked the Captain of

the Silver Kings, as he leveled the revolver at Joe's head.

"I am a youth on my way to the mines."

"Ah! you are going to dig out more precious ore for the Silver Kings? That is right, and you are welcome, for the more miners, the more silver for the Silver Kings!" was the reply.

"Are you the Captain of the Silver Kings?" asked Joe quietly.

"I am, and I will have to deprive you of your horses and outfit. It is but about thirty miles to the mines, and you will have to go the rest of the way on foot."

"So you would rob a mere boy?"

"Ah, yes, you are young, as I can now see. Yes, boy, I would rob a woman, for the Silver Kings must live, you know."

"Do you respect your own badge?"

"What badge?"

"The Silver Star of the Silver Kings."

"Certainly; I respect it when I see it."

"Well, I have one."

"By Jove! so you have! Where did you get it?"

"From your band back on the trail, who had waited to attack the stage coach."

"Ha! did they attack the coach?" quickly asked the captain.

"Yes; but I was some distance off at the time, and I do not know what booty they got."

"Yes; well, if they got the coach, they got a rich haul, for there were some men along who had plenty of dust."

"But about this star that you wear, youngster?"

"Lieutenant Nick will explain to you, sir, why I have it."

"Why can you not explain?"

"Because he wished to do so himself, captain."

"I see."

"He said it would protect me, sir, in case I met you, and I was simply to tell you that it was all right."

"Yes, I always respect the Magic Star, and will do so now, but I don't exactly understand why Nick gave it to you."

"You'll know all about it, sir, soon."

"Where are you from?"

"Texas."

"Ah! a great State, and I once lived there myself."

"But it got pretty hot for me, and business is far better here."

"Your business?" ventured Joe.

"Yes; robbing," was the cool reply, and he added:

"And killing those who would not be robbed quietly."

Joe felt uneasy, and he was anxious to go on.

But he dared not show it, and so waited for the Silver Kings' captain to speak.

"Do you know Texas Jack, in Texas?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; he is my best friend, and I have been at his ranch for some time."

Joe saw that he had made a mistake in what he said, for the outlaw captain fiercely responded:

"Curse him! He drove me out of Texas, and I have vowed to some day get even with him."

"Jack is rather hard on outlaws and Indians," said Joe, with sudden anger.

"Yes, and I will be merciless to him some day."

"You are his friend, you say?"

"Yes, sir; he always called me his Boy Pard."

"I see, and you may be sent here as a spy on me."

"Lieutenant Nick will explain all that, sir," answered Joe, feeling that he was getting into a close place.

"Well, I hope the explanation will be a satisfactory one, for if not, I will make these mines too hot for you, Boy Pard of Texas Jack."

"Lieutenant Nick will tell you where to find me, sir."

"All right, I will wait until I see him, but I am half-way tempted to take you back with me."

"You know best, captain, but you would only give me a long ride for nothing, as after you see Lieutenant Nick you would let me go."

"Boy, there is some mystery about this, but, as you wear the Magic Star, I will let you go, and Nick doubtless can explain all to my satisfaction."

"But should you write to your friend, Texas Jack, tell him that Captain Angelos, the Outlawed Ranchero, as I am known in Texas, will some day hang him to a tree."

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you will tell him?"

"Yes, sir, when I see him."

"See that you do."

"Yes, sir."

"Now you can go on your way; but there is no place in Arizona that you can hide, if I find you have deceived me."

Joe laughed, and the chief, without noticing it, called to his men and rode on, leaving the youth at a stand-still.

"Dogs and ponies, I guess we won't halt tonight, for this is not a healthy neighborhood for us."

"We will ride through the night, and at no slow pace either," and chuckling at his escape through having the Magic Star,* Joe rode on at a canter.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BOY MINER.

FROM the little he had seen of Captain Angelos, of the Silver Kings, Joe felt that he was not a man to make idle threats, and yet the boy was so full of a courage that amounted to recklessness, that he burst out laughing as he thought what a scene would follow the arrival of the chief in the camp of his lieutenant, and the discovery of his capture and flight.

"I tell you," Joe said to himself, as he rode along, "there will be the mischief to pay, for that captain can get mad clean through."

"I'll have to keep a watch on him, too, for he will catch me if he can."

"But I shall write Jack at once, when I reach the mines, and warn him of the man."

"I heard of the Outlawed Ranchero, when I was in Texas, and that Jack had driven him out of the State, but I did not expect to meet him, and I do not care to again, unless the odds are in my favor."

"Come, ponies, there is no rest for us until we reach the mining-camps."

So Joe kept up his rapid pace, and early in the morning reached the camps.

Asking for the house of Allan Morse, Joe was directed to a neat cabin on the hillside, and riding thither, he was recognized by the Morse children, who ran out to give him a greeting.

Mrs. Morse also appeared and welcomed him with almost affection, while one of the children was sent to the mine after the father.

"We are better off, Joe, than when you saw us last, and yet we owe it to you, for if you had not helped us we could not have come here," said Mrs. Morse.

The miner soon appeared, and the worried look had gone from his face, and he wrung the hand of his young benefactor until Joe winced with pain.

"I've got a good cabin here, Joe, and some land about it, and we are well fixed, while our mine is panning out well."

"I am so glad you have come, and you can mine at your will, and look after the books for us, for we have a stock company at the Silver Star Mine."

"It will pay you well, Joe, and maybe you can strike it rich, too, in prospecting around."

Such was Joe's welcome at the house of the poor emigrants whom he had befriended in the wagon train, as the reader will remember.

They had all the comforts which that wild region could procure for them, and already Mr. Morse said he was getting to be a rich man, as he had a few thousands laid by, and the mine continued to pan out well.

Joe selected a place for his cabin, off to itself on the hillside, and willing hands helped him to build it very quickly, and he was comfortably settled within a week after his arrival.

There was good grazing-ground and a mountain brook of finest water for his horses, there was plenty of game in the valleys and among the hills, and the youth divided up his time to suit himself.

He was wont to work in the mine in the morning, hunt or fish in the afternoon, and at night work on the books of the Star Mine, and also for others, as he got plenty to do.

His game and fish he gave to Mrs. Morse always, for he took his meals at the Morse cabin, and he settled down to a life of perfect contentment, which chimed in well with his taste.

He was making money, sufficient to send his mother a hundred dollars a month, and still keep a "nest-egg" for himself, and he found himself quite a hero, as the stage-driver, whom he had warned of danger, always took his day off in the mines, and he told of Joe's escape from the Silver Kings, and how he had enabled those

*This star Arizona Joe now has and prizes it most highly, for he owed his life to having it when he met the captain of the Silver Kings.—THE AUTHOR.

in the coach to dash through the outlaws, killing two of them, as they attempted to check them.

Miner Morse also made known Joe's adventures on the long trail to Texas, and, when his brave ride alone through the Arizona mines was noised about, he was looked upon as indeed a hero.

The fame of the noted Texan scout was a by-word in the mines, and when the miners knew that Joe had been his comrade and on the war-path with him, he became known under the sobriquet of "Arizona Joe, the Boy Pard of Texas Jack."

As time went by in the mines, the depredations of the Silver Kings increased, and the miners were in daily and nightly dread of the bold band of outlaws.

Twice they had dashed, over a score in numbers, up to the Star Mine, and Joe felt assured that their visit was intended for him, and he was most wary in his movements, for he had received a letter from Captain Angelos which was as follows:

"ARIZONA JOE, TEXAS JACK'S PARD:—

"I have discovered the bold deceit practiced upon me, and as I warned you the night we met, I now repeat that warning that you are doomed the moment you fall into my hands."

"ANGELOS,

"Captain of Silver Kings."

Another source of annoyance to the miners were the Apache Indians, and between them and the Silver Kings' life in Arizona was by no means a happy existence.

One night Joe went over to the Morse cabin, to find the poor miner, just starting to see him, in the greatest grief; for Lena, his beautiful daughter of fourteen, had been kidnapped, but whether by the Indians or the Silver Kings no one knew, for in the darkness no one had seen who the horsemen were who had dashed up and seized her, as she was seated in the door of the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE YOUNG RANGERS.

The capture of Lena Morse was a bitter blow in the mining-camps.

She had won many hearts by her childish beauty and sweet ways, and there were scores of hardy miners who came to the cabin of Allan Morse and offered their services to go in chase of the captors of the young girl.

The night was dark, and no trail could be followed, while it was also not known who were the vandals—red-skins, or white men.

It entered the thoughts of Joe that the Silver Kings were the kidnappers, and he feared it had been done as a stroke of revenge at him, because he was the friend of the miner.

Since his stay in the mines, Joe had found himself the beau ideal of a number of youths, the sons of the different miners.

There was Dick Morse, the one to whom he had given the rifle he had won, when with the wagon train, and the boy though a trifle younger than Joe looked up to him as a superior in everything, and never tired of singing his praises.

Dick had become a good shot, rode well, and he had plenty of pluck.

Then there were fully a score of youths, ranging from fifteen to eighteen, and they all followed the lead of Arizona Joe, who had organized a band of "rangers."

There were but thirteen in the band, for Joe had become really superstitious about that number; but, as there were as many more youths to draw upon, he had organized them into an equal number known as Silver Star Guard.

The fact was that Joe in getting his rangers together, had the aim in view of some day making a successful raid upon the Silver Kings.

There were no soldiers near the mining-camps, and the miners were constantly at work, and as the Apaches were troublesome at times, and the outlaws also, he thought it would be a good idea to show that they had a force ready to defend the cabins.

The miners encouraged the idea, and the youths mounted and armed themselves most thoroughly, and were as proud of their captain as he was of them.

Joe had been nearly a year in the mining camps, when Lena Morse was kidnapped, and in his many rides about the country had learned it thoroughly.

As soon as it became known that Lena was stolen, he sent out messengers for his rangers to assemble ready for the trail.

They were all at the cabin of the youth within an hour, mounted and armed for the war-path.

"Boys, Lena Morse has been taken, as you know, and if we wait to follow the trail by daylight, they may carry her to some place in the mountains where we can never find her."

"Somehow I am sure it is the Silver King who kidnapped her, for were they Indians they would not have passed half a dozen cabins, molesting no one, stolen one girl and run off. They would have shot down all they saw and burned the cabins."

"Now I know about the trail Captain Angelos would take to his haunts, and I move that we start at once in chase."

There was not a dissenting voice, and ten minutes after the little band of Thirteen Rangers rode quietly away from the camps, and started on the trail which it had been said the kidnappers had taken in their flight with Lena Morse.

Joe knew that whether Indians or Silver Kings they could go but one way for a number of miles, when the trail branched off into half a dozen, as it descended into the valley.

The valley was open, a couple of miles in width and from the mountain-ridge a grand view of it could be seen by day.

The boy ranger captain did not anticipate being able to see by night, but he knew that the moon rose by ten o'clock, and, with the aid of a lantern which they had brought along, they would be able to discover the exact trail taken by the kidnappers, who had been reported to be seven in number.

"If they go across the valley it will be to the Indian country, and if along the base of the ridge, they will go toward the haunts of the Silver Kings," said Joe, as they reached the place where the trails branched off.

"If they take the former trail, they will be red-skins then, who have stolen sis," said Dick Morse.

"No, that won't prove them so, as the Silver Kings are friendly with the Indians and may take her to one of their villages."

"Poor Lena," said Dick.

"I think the Silver Kings have got her, as I said, and will make your father pay a big sum to get her back, if we don't rescue her, Dick, for they would not dare to harm her," Joe said.

A search of the ground with the lantern showed the tracks of seven horses, and they had taken the trail leading across the valley.

"They have gone toward the Indian country; but we will follow," said Joe, who had been on too many a scene of danger with Texas Jack, to fear the danger ahead when he had a dozen brave young rangers to depend upon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PRISONER.

As the party of young rangers were preparing to start, one of their number called for silence.

The moon was rising over the mountain and its rays fell upon the valley, revealing the form of a horse and rider.

He was coming across the level trail, and would in fifteen minutes be near them.

"Remain here with the horses, two of you, and the balance come with me," said Joe.

He led them hastily down the trail to a number of large rocks, and placing them in good positions, awaited the coming of the horseman.

The stranger was now not far away, riding slowly up the mountain-side and he was plainly revealed by the moonlight.

As he came near enough, there came a whining sound and Joe sent a lasso whirling through the air, he having already attached the other end to a small scrub oak that grew in a crevice of the rocks.

As he threw the lariat he called out:

"Hands up, or you die!"

The lasso settled over the head of the startled man, and his horse would have bounded off and dragged him from the saddle, had not one of the rangers sprung out and grasped his rein.

"My hands is up," said the man, and the rangers gathered about him:

At a glance Joe recognized him, as he said:

"What in thunder are up, anyhow, that an honest man is caught like a wild mustang?"

"Ah, Mustang Mose, it is you, is it?"

"Lordy! you is Joe," cried the man.

"Yes, and I wish to have a little talk with you and alone."

"Boys, will you return to the horses, and I'll soon join you."

"There's no danger then, Joe?" said one.

"No, for I know this man, as we are old friends."

The young rangers walked off up the mountain trail, while Mustang Mose stood regarding his captor in silence.

"We meet again, Mustang Mose."

"So we does."

"You hav'n't your red mask on to-night?"

"No, we only wears that when we is on ther trail together and means business."

"I see; but let me ask you if you got into trouble the night you and Pete let me go?"

"No, it worked all right; but Pete had better stayed longer in ther camp."

"Why?"

"Well, he hed jist told ther lieutenant how you and your dogs had caught him, when the stage was heerd coming, and we got ready ter stop it."

"Well?"

"I guess you knows."

"It didn't stop then?"

"Not much, and I guesses you knows why."

Joe laughed, and Mustang Mose continued:

"Waal, you told 'em, I knows, for they was ready for us, and Lieutenant Nick and Parson Pete were shot down dead."

"I am sorry, but I told him it would come to him some day."

"It came, all-fired quick, Boy Pard; but what does yer want with me?"

"To ask you a few questions."

"Waal?"

"You met Captain Angelos and some of his men on the trail?"

"How does you know?"

"He had a girl captive with him?"

"You know it all."

"Where is he taking her?"

"I don't know."

"Mustang Mose, that girl is as dear to me as a sister, and you know I don't wish harm to come to you."

"I could hold you now, if I did, take you to the camps as a Silver King, and they would hang you, but I will not do so, and I want you to be square with me."

"I'll not betray my pards, if I hangs for it."

"I don't ask you to betray them, but I do ask you to tell me where Captain Angelos is going to take the young girl."

Mustang Mose was quiet a moment, and then he said:

"Boy Pard, I'm a bad man, and I do heaps o' wicked things; but I doesn't want to see no red-skins kill my own people, as Captain Angelos and nine of the men does. I is in for robbin' a stage-coach, even if we has to spill blood to git ther money; but thet are well, and I'm going to tell you a secret."

"I will appreciate it, Mustang."

"I were with Captain Angelos when he caught the gal."

"Yes."

"He went there to catch you."

"I see."

"But he missed finding your cabin and caught up the gal, for he heerd she was kin to yer, though I know'd different, and that she was the sweet leetle gal as come with us along with ther train."

"Yes, Mose."

"Now ther cap'n is taking her to ther camp o' thet red Apache chief, Bad Spirit, to hold her captive for him until the miners pay big for her release."

"Yes."

"And Bad Spirit will do it, for he and ther cap'n are pards."

"I see; but where is the village of Bad Spirit?"

"In the Wild Mountains."

"You know the mountains, Mustang?"

"I guess I does."

"I will tell you what I will do."

"Waal, Boy Pard."

"I'll give you one hundred dollars if you will guide me there."

"It's awful risky, pard."

"I'll take the risk if you will."

"When?"

"I will meet you here to-morrow at any time you say."

"Call it noon, and I'll be here, Pard Joe."

"All right."

"I will have to ask you to bring a strange horse with yer, for mine would be known."

"I will do so."

"And now, Pard Joe, I wants ter tell yer why I'm here now."

"Well, Mose?"

"The cap'n sent me here to wait until some two hundred Apache warriors from old Bad Spirit's camp came here, and I'm to guide 'em into the camps, which they is to raid to-night."

"Oh, Mustang Mose."

"I've told yer, and I tell yer, boy, you git back as fast as yer kin, for they means business, them Injuns does, as you knows they hain't no play red-skins, but red-handed from the elbow. Let me tell you jist what to do, and then skip,"

and Mustang Mose drew Joe into the shadow of a thicket further up the trail, for the moonlight shone brightly on them where they had been standing.

CHAPTER XXV.

READY FOR THE APACHE RAIDERS.

"PARD Joe, I'm talkin' Gospil now," said Mustang Mose, as soon as the two stood in the shadows of the thicket.

"Yes, Mose."

"And I tell you, that within a hour thar will be along here two hundred Apaches, and that they is going straight for ther mining-camps."

"I is to guide 'em to whar is the best place to enter ther camps, and they is ter then do ther red work."

"Now I has ter guide 'em, thet are sart'in, but I'll tell yer what I'll do."

"What is that?"

"Thar are three trails that go into the camps, arter you cross the brook."

"Yes."

"I'll send the largest forces by the right-hand trail, and have the next largest go by the left, while, with a few warriors I'll take the middle one."

"Mind you, remember I goes the middle trail, so don't make no mistake and have me shooted."

"No, Mose."

"You kin let me get off safe."

"I'll tell you a better plan, Mose."

"Yas, Joe."

"This side of the brook is what we call the Rock Nest."

"I can have the miners in ambush there, and when you come in sight of it, take two Indians and ride on, pretending to reconnoiter."

"You ride ahead of the two Indians, and we will let you pass all right."

"Then you give a call you can agree upon, and when the others are going past the Rock Nest we will open on them, and you can make a circuit by another trail and escape."

"That will do better, Joe; but you don't want to lose no time."

"I'll be off at once."

"Now good-night, Mustang Mose, and you know I appreciate all you have done this night."

"I'll be here to-morrow at noon, if I am alive."

"Alone, you remembers, and with a strange horse for me."

"I'll not forget, Mose."

So saying Joe hastened on up the trail, and calling to his comrades to mount and follow him, they rode away like the wind.

Leading the way Joe kept his horse in a run, and his companions were sure that he had gained more news of importance.

Up hill and down they went, never allowing their horses a breathing spell until Rock Nest was reached.

Here Joe drew rein, and he said:

"Boys, two hundred Apache warriors are now marching on our camp."

"They will be here within two hours, perhaps sooner, and I wish each one of you to arouse the miners."

"Tell them to arm themselves and come at once to the Rock Nest here."

"Let them hide their horses, those that ride beyond the brook, but here they must come to ambush those red-skins, and they have not a moment to lose."

"I will rouse the miners on my road, so now let us be off, for we must give those red-skins a fearful whipping."

The boys dashed away, crossed the brook, and dividing into three parties went the different trails running into the mining-camps.

Joe kept on his way direct to the cabin of Allan Morse.

A number of miners were still there, late as was the hour, plotting and planning for the best thing to do on the morrow.

Up dashed Joe in the moonlight, and half a dozen voices called out:

"It's Arizona Joe!"

"Yes, and I have news, too."

"Mr. Morse, don't worry, for Lena was kidnapped by the Silver Kings' captain, and will be held until the camps pay for her return."

"But let me tell you all that two hundred Apache braves are now marching on the camp, hoping to surprise it."

"They are about ten miles away, and we will ambush them at the Rock Nest, before they reach the camps."

"Let every man go there at once, fully armed, and the women can lock the cabins, and stand ready to fire on the red-skins, should any break through the ambushade."

"Come, one and all, for you have no time to lose."

The words of Arizona Joe created the wildest consternation for a moment, and men ran to their cabins to arm and repair to the rendezvous.

Joe had a few words with Mr. Morse and his wife, to cheer them up, and he told them that Lena would soon be restored to them.

"I will give all I have with pleasure," said the grieving father.

"Yes, and the miners would all pay liberally, and this the Silver Kings know."

"If once you paid to get a captive back, they would be kidnapping all the time, and it would ruin the camps."

"I've got a plan I think will work, and if I fail, then it will be time enough to try another way."

"But, Mr. Morse, do not let any one go to try and find her to-morrow, I beg of you."

"I have every confidence in you, and it shall be as you say."

"But come; we must be off for the Rock Nest."

As they went along they saw others wending their way in the same direction, and arriving at the Rock Nest, so called from the peculiar gathering there of the huge bowlders, they found a score of men before them.

In half an hour more all had gathered, whom the rangers had had time to warn, and there were over half a hundred well-armed, determined men there.

Joe told them in a few words his plan, and urged that no one should fire until he gave the rangers' cry, for the youngsters had a peculiar war-cry of their own, which Joe had learned from Texas Jack and taught them.

"Under no circumstances fire upon those who go in advance," said Joe.

Positions were then taken by all among the rocks, and Joe had his rangers near him, with their horses back in a thicket, where they could quickly mount and give pursuit.

The moon, though on the wane, shone brightly, and a silence fell upon all, broken only by the cry of night insects in the lowlands, or the howl of a wolf afar off.

The rangers had been hurriedly summoned, but they were on duty and ready to meet the foe that sought to attack them in their homes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RED-FACE AND PALE-FACE.

No one, not even a red-skin, accustomed as he was to always look for surprises and be suspicious, would have dreamed that those barren rocks on the left of the trail concealed the forms of over half a hundred brave men.

The trail seemed to wind around them, as though nature had made it the very place for an ambush, for it formed a crescent almost half about them, and but thirty paces distant.

The spot was in a lowland, with the mountain half a mile behind, and the hills rising in front, after crossing a brook beyond the Rock Nest.

Among those hills, scattered along a space of several miles, were the cabins of the miners, and it was estimated that three hundred souls were there, including women and children, of whom there were about four-score.

Some of the cabins were most comfortable and home-like, as was that of Allan Morse, whose gentlemanly bearing and education, far superior to any others in the camp, had soon made him a leading man among the miners.

There was a store, a blacksmith shop, a log school-house for the children, a coach office and stables, for it was an important station on the stage trail, and what purported to be a hotel, for it was called the Valley Rest, though it was not an inviting hostelry by any means.

The distance to the Nest of Rocks from the main camp was about half a mile, so that the miners had quickly assembled there under the urging of Arizona Joe's young rangers.

Some were armed with repeating rifles, others with single-barrel rifles, a few with double-barrel shot-guns, loaded with slugs, and all had revolvers.

The discovery of the attack being made by Joe, his being captain of the rangers, and Mr. Morse yielding to him, not a word was said against his being the commander, young as he was.

No one knew just what was to happen, and they did not then question.

They were aware that they were to meet about four times their numbers, of the bravest Indians in the world, and felt that they needed the surprise to help them.

So they lay quietly among the rocks awaiting the signal from their young commander.

Soon, in the distance, the moonlight revealed dark forms approaching.

They came along slowly, their horses at a walk, and they rode less like Indians, and more like cavalry, for half a dozen were abreast, and they kept well closed up.

Fully three hundred yards away from the Rock Nest they halted.

Then the moonlight revealed three horsemen advancing from the body and coming slowly on. The others remained at a stand-still.

That the Indians behind them were to give the camp a thorough surprise there was no doubt; but with their usual caution they wished to be safe in all they did.

They had never made a raid in force upon the camps, though many an isolated miner had fallen a victim to their hatred.

"They hated the pale-faces, who had invaded their country, and they wished to kill them, men, women and children."

Then too the miners had some fine horses, cattle and many things in their cabins the red-skins coveted, such as food, blankets and arms.

The store was filled with what would make the Apache heart glad, and with all these mining attractions and urged on by the Silver King chief, they sought to raid the settlement.

Let the red-skins sweep the settlement, and the Silver Kings meant to follow like wolves in their wake, and gather up the precious ore the miners left.

Having separated themselves from the force, the three men rode on toward the brook.

They passed along the curving trail about the Rock Nest and disappeared in the timber that grew on either side of the brook.

Not even the two Indians, with the instinct almost of dogs, detected the presence of danger.

Mustang Mose rode in front, and the two Indians followed, the three riding in single file.

They were heard to go into the brook, the splashing of the water reaching the ears of the crouching miners.

Behind them the mass of red-skin horsemen kept as still as did the miners, their cunning Indian ponies seeming to also understand that they were to remain silent.

Joe was at the end of the Rock Nest near the Indians, and he alone was watching their movements, through a branch of a tree he had broken off at the brook and stuck up on the rocks, as though growing there.

He heard Mustang Mose and his companions cross the brook, and then came the sharp yelp of a wolf from their direction.

Instantly the Indian raiders began to move forward once more.

They had heard the signal that all was well, from the reconnoitering party in advance, and they were gloating over the triumph they soon would have.

But they kept the same silence as before, and moved in the same deliberate way.

Once they came in sight of the horses of their foes, and they would be far different.

Marshy ground surrounded the Rocks Nest, to the left of the trail, so that if an Indian had attempted to explore it, his horse would have mired up to his knees.

The only way to get among the rocks was from the sloping hill in their rear.

But no red-skin attempted an investigation of the Rock Nest, and the leaders were about passing by when suddenly a wild yell rung out.

All knew the signal, and fifty guns flashed almost together from among the rocks, and then followed the rattle of the repeating rifles, the wild cries of the red-skins, neighing of frightened horses and the cheers of the miners.

Taken completely by surprise the Apaches and their ponies were thrown into a confused mass.

Then more of the boldest warriors attempted to charge upon the rocks, when their ponies sunk to their knees in the mire.

Feeling that their foes were prepared for them, their firing showing a large force, the red-skins decided upon one course, and that they lost no time in carrying out.

In haste they fled from the field, followed by a hot fire from the miners, and a moment after in their rear came the clatter of hoofs, and, besides Joe and his rangers, a score of mounted men started in full chase.

Their rifles rattled as they ran, and the Apaches fired back as they fled, so that it was a running battle of several miles.

Then, fearing an ambush, as they reached a good country for the Indians to entrap them, the recall was given and the victorious miners went back to their comrades at the brook.

They found them burying the Indian dead, for there were no wounded red-skins, as no mercy had been shown by the enraged miners.

The defenders however had not escaped unscathed, for several dead miners had been sent to their cabins, and a number of wounded also.

Still the victory was a glorious one, and to Joe Bruce was given the credit that it had not turned out far differently.

As to how he had gotten his information, and who was his informant, Joe was silent, for he would not betray Mustang Mose.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SECRET SCOUT.

WHEN the sun arose upon the mining-camps, it fell upon a mourning people, for there was death in their midst, and a number of men were suffering with wounds.

Still all felt how different a scene would have been presented had the Indians surprised the settlement, as, but for Joe Bruce, would certainly have been the case.

A council was held among the miners, and the youth was given the thanks of the settlement, while he was also asked to attend the consultation as to what was best for the protection of the camps in future.

Mr. Morse had held a short conversation with Joe, and he suggested that the "Boy Rangers," as the little band of horsemen was called, should assume the duties of a guard, acting as scouts and sentinels.

They could be spared from the mines, and each miner could subscribe a sum each month to pay for their services, so that their task would not be without recompense.

This proposition of Miner Morse was received with unanimous approbation, and "Captain Joe" was accordingly told to arrange his men with a view to the protection of the camps, using his comrades for scouts, and keeping a sentinel at night upon each of the two trails leading into the camps.

Joe was proud of this distinction, and at once went to inform his comrades of the honor done them.

Then he told his lieutenant just what to do, as he was going out of camp for a while.

Half an hour after, mounted upon his best horse, and with a led animal, also, he rode away from the settlement, replying to the numerous questions as to where he was going:

"On a secret scout."

Joe, as the reader has doubtless surmised, was going to meet Mustang Mose.

He rode cautiously, for he did not know but that a band of Apaches might be lying in ambush.

But the red-skins had suffered heavily, and they had all they wanted to do to get back to their village with their dead and wounded.

It was just noon when Joe reached the spot where he had appointed to meet Mustang Mose, and he dismounted to give his horse a rest.

An hour passed, and then he saw a horseman approaching along the valley trail.

It was Mustang Mose he saw, as he drew nearer, though the red cloth mask was now over his face.

"You is here, Boy Pard?" said the outlaw, as he rode into the thicket.

"Yes, Mose."

"What a all-fired lickin' yer did give them 'Paches last night."

"Thanks to you, yes, and I will see that a purse is made up for you among the miners."

"Lordy! yer didn't give me away, did yer?"

"Not I; but the men knew I got my information from some source, and I will tell them soon that it was from a person I wish to reward, that is all."

"You is a man in that camp, Joe, and no mistake."

"Now can you go?"

"Yas."

"I have your horse."

"So I sees."

"Well, what is the plan?"

"Bad Spirit's camp is thirty mile from here."

"Yes."

"It's on a spur o' ther mountains, and ten regiments o' soldiers couldn't whip old Bad Spirit and his warriors out of it."

"But one or two might get there?"

"Yas."

"How?"

"As Silver Kings."

"I see, you want me to play outlaw."

"It hain't no play, for you has got ter be a Silver King to go thar with me."

"Well?"

"It's chances."
 "I know that."
 "Yer see things kinder work our way, for ther cap'n left this mornin' for ther lower trails, and I were put on duty all alone along ther trail whar we tuk you in."

"Yes."
 "Waal, I jist decided on a leetle game, which were ter give you a red mask, and change my outfit a leetle, fer Injuns is awful cunning, and we kin go up to the village of old Bad Spirit."

"And then?"
 "The cap'n placed ther gal in ther charge o' ther old Injun until he sh'd send for her, and I'll jist tell him ther cap'n sent fer her, and begged him ter take a leetle present fer his pains."

"Has yer anything along yer could give ther red scamp?"

"I could have brought something; but I have your money for you."

"Give him that and pay me another time, and you kin give a revolver fer a horse fer the gal ter ride."

"I will."
 "Thet settles it, and we'll hev a leetle dinner now, and I'll stake my horse over yonder in ther canyon until we comes back, and change my clothin' a leetle, so as ter disguise myself."

This was the plan, and half an hour after the two started upon their perilous ride to the Apache camp.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DARING GAME TO PLAY.

In many ways Captain Angelos had won the favor of the Apaches.

He sent them presents of various kinds, had given rifles and revolvers to the chiefs, and many a robbery had been committed simply to get material for the red-skins.

As he made war upon his own people, there was a bond of sympathy between him and the Indians.

When he left Texas, on account of his acts of outlawry there, when he was supposed to be an honest ranchero, he had sought an asylum of safety among the Apaches, and all of them seemed to like him.

Thus, by his cunning, was the Silver King chief enabled to see the red-skins as a protection, for if pursued, by miners or soldiers, he retreated into the fastnesses of the mountains, into the heart of the Indian country, where no one dared follow him.

When he had dashed into the mining-camps that night, it was in the hope of capturing Joe Bruce, as Mustang Mose had said; but when unable to find the youth in his hasty raid, he had seized upon Lena Morse, who was seated in front of her cabin, and she had been borne off.

Reaching the valley the Silver King chief had given the maiden to several warriors, to carry to the village of Bad Spirit, who was leading the attack upon the settlement.

As Mustang Mose knew the strength of the mining-camps, and the best point of attack, he had been loaned to the Indian chief as a guide, and had gone on to the outlaw haunt to get a fresh horse and await on the ridge the coming of the red-skins.

He had been to the outlaw haunt, and was on his way to the ridge, where he fell into the hands of Joe Bruce and his ranger pards.

After the defeat of Bad Spirit, and his flight back to the mountains, Captain Angelos, who was waiting the result of the intended massacre, hastily decided upon a visit with his men to the lower trails, and this was fortunate for Joe.

And more fortunate was it that Mustang Mose was selected as the man to remain in the haunt, and receive any news that might come there from the spies of the Silver Kings, as to the movements of the silver trains out of the settlements.

Mose had said he was tired out by his ride with the chief, when Lena Morse was taken, and his band run to escape, after the ambush of the Apaches, and so the chief had told him to remain in the retreat, and this had been just what he wanted, as it enabled him to keep his appointment with Joe.

No blame whatever was put upon him by the Indians for the ambush, for the entire mass were riding by the rocks, as Mustang Mose and his two Indian companions had done, without discovering the presence of a foe.

The moment the volley had been fired, Mustang Mose led his two red-skin comrades in flight, and making a circuit of the camps, they reached the valley where the Silver Kings and the demoralized Apaches were assembled.

The red-skins were incumbered with their

dead and wounded, and they did not tarry long, for their fright exaggerated the number of their foes, and Mustang Mose said that he was sure there were soldiers in the settlement, and a pursuit would follow.

So the Apaches pushed on for their mountain retreats, and the Silver Kings started for the lower trails, half a hundred miles away, where they could strike other stage lines for a few days.

All this did Mustang Mose explain to Joe as they rode along, and then he added:

"Now my plan is for us to git to Bad Spirit's village by night, and I'm to tell him that ther cap'n has sent fer ther gal, for I knows tha'r lingo as I does my Bible lessons."

"A great deal better, I guess, Mose," said Joe with a laugh.

"We'll purchase a pony from old Bad Spirit for the gal to ride and give him what presents you wishes, and then light out."

"I'll come back with yer as far as whar I left my horse, and there make for ther retreat camp, and you kin skip on to ther settlement, and ef yer wishes ter see me fer that leetle matter o' a purse yer speaked of, you kin find me one week from ter-day at ther place whar we meet ter-day."

"I will be there, Mose."

"But let it be at night, pard, say jist arter dark, fer I hes got ter be all-fired careful."

"I know you have, Mose, and I have to be also."

"But I will be there, with your money, and we will have a little talk."

"All right, pard; but now let us push on a leetle further, for we must reach ther village o' Bad Spirit soon after nightfall."

"I tell yer darkness helps a heap when a feller is playin' a bold hand ag'in' death."

"It does, indeed, Mose," was Joe's quiet reply; but he showed no sign that he feared to face the ordeal, be what it might.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE APACHE VILLAGE.

THE sun had just disappeared beneath the horizon as Joe and Mustang Mose rode into the very heart of the Indian retreat.

There was an Indian lookout standing near a tall pine, and he had been regarding them for a long time as they came along the valley trail, and then ascended the mountain.

He seemed very morose when Mustang Mose addressed him in his own language, but took it for granted they were both Silver Kings, and was at heart not unfriendly.

Mustang Mose learned that the chief was at the village, and thither they rode.

As they drew near there came the sound of wailing, and Mustang Mose said:

"They is a-howlin' over ther dead, Boy Pard, and I'm reckonin' they hain't in ther best o' speerits; but we is in fer it, and thar is no gettin' out, ef yer wants ter save ther gal."

"I do."

"Then yer says go in?"

"Certainly."

"White folks hain't becomin' at a Injun wailin' when white folks has caused 'em to set up ther tuae."

"But I'll jist jump in an' howl a little mournin' myself, and that will make 'em see we is all right."

"I thought there was no trouble between the Apaches and the Silver Kings."

"Thar hain't, only we strikes 'em in thar sorrow."

"But come on, and we'll git thar."

The two rode into the Indian village soon after.

Hundreds of eyes were upon them, but no hostility was shown, as their red masks proclaimed them to be Silver Kings.

The dead warriors were the cause of the howling that filled the air, and in a dozen or more tepees there lay wounded braves, and some of these must die, so the whole village was in mourning.

Twenty-four hours before two hundred braves under their greatest chief, had ridden forth, promising to kill scores of their foes, and bring back with them riches and booty for their squaws and children.*

They came back after dawn of that day, dragging with them a dozen dead braves, and more than a score of wounded, while some were on foot, their ponies having been killed.

So the village was in a wailing humor, and there were doubtless many that would like to have seen the two supposed Silver Kings tor-

*The Apache Indian never scalps a dead foe.—THE AUTHOR.

tured to death simply because they were pale-faces, of the race that had struck them such a cruel blow.

But no one attempted any act against them, and Mustang Mose led the way up to the tepee of the chief.

He came out as he saw them ride up, and Mustang Mose addressed him in his own tongue.

He was a fine-looking red-skin, tall and muscular, and he looked every inch a chief.

He glanced quickly from the outlaw to Joe, and listened while the former coolly lied to him, telling him that the miners had sent to his chief, asking for the restoration of the girl captive, by the payment of a large sum in silver, and Captain Angelos had decided to give her up, and had sent his brother, Bad Spirit, some presents, and would give more.

At this Mustang Mose turned to Joe, who forked over the hundred dollars in silver and a revolver.

He also gave the old chief a couple of blankets, one red, the other blue, which he had just bought a few days before, and Bad Spirit seemed greatly pleased.

Joe then told Mustang Mose to buy a pony for Lena, and the chief sold him a very pretty spotted animal for thirty dollars, which stripped the youth of funds.

Some food was given the two visitors then, but neither seemed to have much appetite, and were anxious to get away.

Then Bad Spirit led them to a large tepee situated upon a mound, and Mustang Mose explained to Joe that it was the home of Wild Violet, the Apache Queen.

Joe had no time to ask questions about Wild Violet, when that personage appeared, and she was accompanied by Lena Morse, whose eyes were red with weeping, while she was very pale.

The chief said something to the Wild Violet, who told Lena, in perfect English, that she was to leave with the two braves of the Silver King, the miners having arranged to pay a ransom for her.

The eyes of the poor girl brightened at this, and she turned and thanked Wild Violet over and over again.

The latter was scarcely over eighteen, and that she was a pale-face there was no shadow of doubt.

She was beautiful in face and form, and rigged out gorgeously as an Indian queen, for she held great power in the Apache camp, and was looked upon with almost reverence.

About her neck and waist were entwined living serpents, but the girl seemed to hold no fear of them, and in fact fondled them, to the horror of Lena, Joe and the outlaw.

The spotted pony was then gotten ready with an Indian saddle, and Mustang Mose aided her to mount, when the three rode away from the tepee, leaving Wild Violet gazing sadly after them.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WILD VIOLET.

THAT Lena Morse was most happy, in going back to her home, may be well understood.

She did not know who it was that had so daringly come to her rescue, for his face was hidden by the red cloth mask, and in other ways Joe had changed his appearance, as he well knew that his recognition by Lena in the Indian village would be fatal.

When they had left the village some distance behind, Joe dropped back alongside of the girl, for he had been riding in front with Mustang Mose, while she followed.

"You are happy in going home?" he said, in a smothered voice.

"Oh, sir, so happy."

"You owe it to that good man ahead there."

"Who is he?"

"One of the Silver Kings."

"They are bad men."

"True, but that one has befriended you."

"What has he done?"

"He arranged all for your return to your home."

"He is very good."

"But he must not be known in the affair; you must keep it secret that you were saved by a real Silver King."

"I will, sir; but you?"

"I am not a Silver King."

"Who are you, then?"

"Joe Bruce."

"Oh, Joe!"

She looked at him closely in the darkness as they rode along, and he resumed his red mask.

"Oh, Joe!" she repeated.

"Yes, Lena, I will frankly tell you now that we rescued you from the red-skins."

"The truth is, yonder man, whose name I will not mention, is a Silver King; but he is my friend, and he did all to help me rescue you."

"He gave me this mask, and he went with me to the camp of old Bad Spirit, as you saw."

"But Captain Angelos and his men have gone down on the lower trails to rob and murder, and he will be enraged to learn of your escape."

"But he shall know that I did it, and he must believe that the one with me was a miner from the camps, who speaks the Apache tongue, for if it was found out that it was one of the band, he would be put to death at once."

"He is a good man, if he is an outlaw."

"Let me shake hands with him, and tell him how much I thank him."

Mustang Mose winced under the kind words of the girl, and she said:

"You have not a bad heart to do what you have, and I am going to pray that you will not long remain an outlaw, but become a good man."

"Thank yer, miss, but I'm a-fearin' I'll never be much good," replied Mustang Mose, and he added sorrowfully:

"I only wish I c'u'd be."

"Oh, Joe, how brave you have been to rescue me, and won't they all be glad to see me?"

"Do you know the Indians were wild with rage at the defeat they met with, and they cannot understand how the miners were warned of their coming?"

Joe laughed, but made no reply, and Lena continued:

"Joe, did you notice the Apache Queen?"

"Yes. Is she not pretty?"

"She is indeed."

"She is a white girl."

"Yes, a captive, and she has been five years among the Indians."

"Poor girl."

"I pity her, for she is very unhappy, and wishes she could get away."

"I wish so, too."

"They call her Wild Violet, and they are afraid of her."

"So am I, with those horrid snakes about her."

"Joe, that is the way she holds her power over the red-skins, for they think her what we would call a witch."

"I'll tell you about her if you wish."

"Indeed I would like to know of her."

"She told me all about herself, and said her father was a circus man, and he taught her to be a snake charmer."

"He also taught her how to make snakes appear dead, by giving them some kind of medicine, and while they were so to extract their fangs so that they would not be dangerous."

"She was with the circus in a Texas town, when the Apaches raided it, and she was captured and brought as a captive by the red-skins."

"She was a girl then of twelve, and she made the Indians afraid of her, as she had half a dozen snakes about her when she was captured."

"She at once seemed to like their wild life, and even learned their language, and they made her a kind of queen."

"But she has often tried to escape, yet dared not when she knew not the way to go, and she is very wretched and asked me when I went back to beg the miners to rescue her."

Joe was deeply interested in the story of the Wild Violet, and when Lena finished he remained silent for some time.

"Don't you feel sorry for her, Joe?"

"Yes, Lena."

"Do you think she can be rescued?"

"I will see if I cannot rescue her, Lena, and I believe I can," was the response of the youth, for the thought of doing so just chimed in with his adventurous nature.

CHAPTER XXXI.

JOE'S PLOTTING.

THE party of these held steadily on their way, Joe urging the horses, as he did not know what might turn up, and he saw that Mustang Mose was also a trifle anxious.

At last they reached the spot where Mustang Mose had left his horse, and the animal was found just as he had staked him out.

Then the outlaw bade farewell to Joe and Lena, and reminding the former of their appointment for that day week, mounted his own horse and rode away toward the retreat of the Seven Kings.

"Now, Lena, I almost feel that we are safe;

but we must push on rapidly, for I am anxious to get you home," said Joe, and the tired horses were urged on.

"See, day is breaking," said Joe, as they ascended a steep hill, and the sun appeared over the mountain-tops, when they were within a few miles of the camps.

Suddenly, as they were about to descend into the lowlands, near the Nest of Rocks, Joe saw a horseman ride out into the road ahead of them.

"It is your brother Dick," and the youth came on at a gallop toward them.

"Ah, Joe, you have brought sis back," cried the boy, as he affectionately greeted his sister.

"How was it, Joe?" he asked, eagerly.

"Joe played Silver King and went to the Apache camp after me, saying that Captain Angelos had sent him," explained Lena.

Dick Morse then halted, saying that he was on picket duty at his post, and had seen them approaching for a mile or more.

"I was put here at sunrise, to relieve Dan Cooley, and they have all got the blues in the camp, for the funeral is to-day, of those that were killed."

"But I guess you'll brighten them up," said Dick.

Then he remained at his post, while Joe and Lena went on into the camps.

As they were discovered a shout arose, and cries of delight were heard from many a cabin.

Springing from her horse at the door of her cabin, Lena was clasped in her mother's arms, and in the excitement no one noticed Joe slip hastily away to his cabin.

But Lena told the story of her rescue, as she had told it to Dick, and then the crowd rushed to the cabin and Joe was congratulated over and over again upon his splendid pluck that had taken the captive from her foes.

That day the funeral of the slain was held, and Mr. Morse read the service of the dead over them, for there was no parson in the camps.

Joe became more than ever a hero, and at a meeting of the miners that night, he was thanked over and over again for his services.

In an embarrassed way Joe then said:

"There is one thing I wish to speak to you about, gentlemen."

"Hear! hear! Out with it, Joe!" arose the cries on all sides.

"You are all aware that I have not done what I have, alone."

"Yes, yes."

"In fact, it is all due to another, that this camp was not surprised by the Apaches."

"My boy pards know that we captured a horseman whom I recognized."

"Who, or what he is, I will not say, and more, I do not wish a word said about him outside, for if it reached certain ears that there was a traitor in their camp his life would not be worth anything."

"Now he told me of the intended raid of the Apaches; he told me who it was that kidnapped Lena Morse, and through him alone did I rescue her."

"I was to pay him one hundred dollars; but the money I took with me he told me to give old Bad Spirit as a present, and I did, buying the horse also that Lena rode, and giving him one of my revolvers."

"But I told the man that we would make up a purse for him."

"Yes, yes!" shouted the miners!

"The horse I bought, I will give Lena, and the revolver I gave old Bad Spirit is all right; but I'll put in fifty dollars toward a purse."

But this the miners would not hear of, for they said Joe had taken all the risks, and they quickly subscribed different sums, Mr. Morse giving liberally, and thus for Mustang Mose was raised what was called a "purse" of a thousand dollars, though in reality it was a bag of silver.

This was turned over to Joe to take to him when he deemed best.

But Joe was not going to remain idle, and he set about certain plots, with his rangers, in which Mr. Morse was called in as general adviser.

One of these plots was to lay a trap for the Silver Kings, and to do so, it was decided to let it be known, so that the outlaws could hear it, that a night stage was to be run over the trail, carrying a large amount of silver.

This would bring the Silver Kings to lie in wait for it, and then there would be a "surprise party," according to Joe's idea.

The other plot was the rescue of Wild Violet, the Apache Queen, and the better way to carry this out successfully, Joe decided, was to go alone.

It was the latter plot that he determined to

carry out first, and he was anxious to lose no time about it.

To the surprise of many Joe went to the camp store and made a large number of valuable purchases, from red blankets, rifles and revolvers, to fancy articles of various kinds that would catch a savage's eye.

These were all carefully packed in a pack-saddle, and the morning following his arrival with Lena Morse, the brave boy set out alone from the camps, riding a splendid mustang, and with another equally as good, carrying the pack-saddle.

To all questions as to his destination, Joe replied that he was off on a racket for a couple of days.

But there was one who knew his intention, and that was Lena Morse.

That she was aware of Joe's secret adventure, her anxious manner soon revealed to her parents.

But she would not reveal the secret.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JOE'S STRATEGY.

THE plot of Joe Bruce was a good one.

But it certainly was a most bold one.

He had thought that if the Silver Kings were still upon the lower trail, it would be the best time to rescue the Wild Violet.

And more, he had determined to go as a Silver King.

In this he would ask no help from Mustang Mose.

In fact he did not know just where to find that worthy had he wanted him.

So Joe plotted to go to the Apache village of Bad Spirit, and pretend to have come from Captain Angelos of the Silver Kings with presents for the chief, other chiefs, and Wild Violet.

It was a daring game to play, but Joe was a daring fellow and meant to play it successfully.

It was late in the afternoon when, with a red cloth mask, which he had manufactured, over his face, he rode by the Indian sentinel.

Joe had picked up considerable Apache from Texas Jack, and he could with what he knew, and the "sign language" get along.

He asked the woman for Bad Spirit, and was told he was at the tepee.

There was still sorrow in the village of the Apaches, but Joe rode on to the quarters of the old chief.

He met him at his tepee and explained as well as he could that the Silver King chief had sent him with presents.

Old Bad Spirit understood this, where he might not have anything else, and Joe opened his pack.

He gave Bad Spirit a number of presents that fairly tickled the old fellow into laughing with delight, and he laid out presents for other big chiefs, who were at once sent for.

Then he had something for Wild Violet, a red blanket, beads and other trinkets, and she was sent for.

The squaws of Bad Spirit were not forgotten, and the tickled old savage ordered a feast for Joe.

When not able to fully understand Joe in everything, Bad Spirit asked Wild Violet to interpret, which she did, and while talking to her quickly the youth said:

"Inside of the locket I gave you is a note."

"Read it when you go to your tepee and do as I say."

The Wild Violet started, but laughed, as with pleasure, and soon after went to her tepee leaving Joe with Bad Spirit; who had told his squaws to bring forth a feast for the welcome pale-face.

Joe was not hungry enough to enjoy Indian cooking and catering, but he pretended to eat, and the red-skins were so busy, between eating and gazing at their presents, they failed to notice what he did.

The chief seemed really sad when Joe told him he must go back that night, and soon after dark bade him good-by, accepting a pony which Bad Spirit gave him.

In the mean time the Wild Violet had gone to her tepee, and with trembling hands opened her locket.

A small piece of paper, closely folded, fell out, and she took it up and read:

"The Silver King's captive, Lena Morse, told me all about you, and I have come to save you."

"I found a spot where I can meet you to-night."

"It is just under the cliff behind your tepee, so lower yourself over with lariats, and I will be there."

"Do not do so until the village is quiet."

"I am not one of the Silver Kings, but a miner, and will take you to Lena's home."

The girl read this by the firelight, over and

over again, and then she clasped her hands and raised her eyes as though in prayer.

Quickly she got together several lariats, and she knew that she could make one end fast to a tree, and go over the cliff to a spot seventy feet below.

Any other way of leaving the village would be impossible, as guards stood at the different trails leading therefrom, and the camp was upon a bold mountain spur, with precipitous sides that only a bird could scale.

When she glanced from her tepee and saw that the village was quiet, she slipped out and tied the lariat to a tree near by.

The other end she dropped over the edge of the cliff, and heard it fall below.

Then she returned to the tepee and made what things she wished to carry into a bundle, leaving, however, her snakes behind her.

Slipping out, she reached the edge of the cliff, and seizing the rope firmly, swung herself over.

Down she went, hand under hand, her bundle tied to her back, and soon reached the ground.

No one was there, and in fear she waited.

She then remembered that Joe had not been gone very long, and had quite a distance to travel.

Soon she saw a form advancing through the darkness, and his approach was noiseless.

"Ah! you are here?" he said, as he saw the maiden.

"Yes."

"Come with me," and he led her away, back on the trail he had come.

It was a rough walk of over half a mile, through dense timber; but he had taken his bearings in the daylight, when he had tied his horses and looked the field over for an escape by night.

The horses were soon reached, and mounting, they rode on their way, Joe leading the pony given him by the chief.

At first they rode slowly, but gaining the valley they pushed on at a run.

No word was spoken, for only the idea of escape was in the minds of both.

Daylight dawned and found them near the camps of the miners, their horses tired out, though Joe had shifted riders several times with the extra horse.

Into the mining-camps they rode, and Joe's secret was out, and the Wild Violet received a welcome that proved to her that she was among friends in earnest.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A TRAP WELL SET.

TRUE to his appointment, Joe went to meet Mustang Mose.

He found the outlaw already awaiting him, and he said, as the youth rode up:

"I was afeerd yer c'u'dn't come, pard."

"Oh, yes; but I was not anxious to get here before dark."

"But what is the news?"

"Yer fetched along thet hundred dollars, Joe?" asked the outlaw, anxiously.

"Yes, and a purse of a thousand dollars."

"Jerusha! I'm in luck."

"You are, indeed; and you'll have more luck when you leave the Silver Kings."

"Waal, I may, some day, fer I've got a snug leetle pile laid away at camp, and this makes me feel good."

"But ther news, Joe, am thet ther cap'n are red-hot."

"What about?"

"He got wind that you and a pard, as some said was Texas Jack, went and rescued ther gal, and he swears ter kill yer."

"All right, Mose."

"Then ther Apaches is wild as goats."

"What about?"

"The way you played it on 'em ter rescue ther Wild Violet."

Joe laughed.

"Oh, I know'd it was you, soon as ther cap'n told about it."

"Yes, I did it, Mose; but let me ask you a favor?"

"Waal?"

"Keep in camp for the next week, pretend to be sick, and don't go on the silver trail."

"What's up?"

"Do as I ask you, and if the Silver Kings leave camp, you be ready to go."

"Keep your money and your traps somewhere else, and you be ready to skip."

"If things go wrong, then come to me, and you'll find friends."

"Mind now, I warn you, so do as I say."

"I'll do it, Pard Joe, and thank you."

"I wish you to come to me, you know, so don't fail."

"Good-by," and Joe mounted his horse and rode away, leaving Mustang Mose very happy over his money, but in a thoughtful mood.

The next week Captain Angelos rode into his retreat near the stage trail, and he was evidently excited.

"Boys, I've got news that a silver coach is to go through to-night, and we must all be on the trail, for maybe she will have two or three guards on board, though as they run through under cover of the darkness, they expect to dodge us."

"But be ready, all of you."

"I can't go, cap'n, for I is very lame with rheumatism," said Mustang Mose.

"All right, you keep camp, but all the rest must go."

That night the Silver Kings, fourteen in number, rode out to the trail, and laid in wait at their usual haunt.

A man was put on watch a hundred yards away, to signal when he heard the coach approaching; but he failed to see that he was observed by half a dozen men on foot, who quietly took to the bushes.

The horseman continued on his post until toward dawn when he heard the rumble of wheels.

At once he rode rapidly back to the ambush and reported, and all were aroused from their blankets and formed for the attack.

Nearer and nearer came the coach, coming at a rapid gait, and as it drew near the outlaw band, suddenly came the stern order:

"Halt or die! hands up, driver!"

The Silver Kings sprung from their covert ahead of the horses, and upon either side, as the coach came to a stand-still.

But suddenly, what had appeared to be boxes on the top of the coach rapidly opened, and half a dozen forms rose from within them and opened fire, while two heads appeared in each coach window and their revolvers began to play upon the outlaws, who were completely taken by surprise.

But Captain Angelos called to his men to rally, the wheel-horses of the coach were shot down, and he intended to fight it out, when wild cries were heard back in the woods, and a voice called out:

"We've got their horses, Captain Joe."

At the same moment there came the clatter of hoofs up the trail, from each direction, and horsemen appeared dashing upon the scene.

It was a complete "surround" and surprise, and the Silver Kings were quickly mastered, for half of their number were either killed or wounded.

The dawn had now come, and the prisoners were secured, while Arizona Joe and his rangers aided by a score of miners, were masters of the situation.

The outlaws refusing to say where their retreat was, Joe took their trail of the night before and followed it to their den, and a number of horses and considerable booty was captured there, though no one was visible in the camp.

With their prisoners and booty the party returned to the settlement, and the infuriated miners made short work of the Silver Kings, who had so cruelly robbed them and often taken human life to do so.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE day after the execution of the Silver Kings, a man rode into the mining-camps and asked to see Captain Joe Bruce.

He was directed to Joe's cabin, and riding up said smilingly:

"I've come, Boy Bard."

"And you are welcome, Mose."

"The Morse family know you, of course, but they will keep the secret, and I will introduce you as an old friend of mine from Texas."

"Thank you, Captain Joe, and I'll turn an honest miner and go shares with you."

"But Lordy! didn't you wipe out the Silver Kings, and I has ter thank yer fer not bein' thar?" and Mustang Mose kept his word, for he did turn out to be an honest miner, no one who knew, betraying his secret.

The Wild Violet became an adopted daughter of Mr. Morse, for her father had been killed in the Indian massacre, when she was captured, and she had no home.

Eventually she married a dashing young miner, who is now a prominent man in Arizona.

As for my hero the name of Arizona Joe stuck to him, and he became one of the leading spirits of Arizona, where he accumulated quite a little fortune, as he had hoped to do, and placed his mother beyond all want.

Often in after years Joe was wont to visit his old friend, Texas Jack, who always called him his "Boy Pard," and spoke of him as the most marvelous shot he had ever seen.

In fact, when Joe married pretty Lena Morse, Texas Jack was his "best man," and pieces of the bride's cake found their way into the mouths of Grip and Grab, who, though aged, were not forgotten by their young master.

THE END.

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